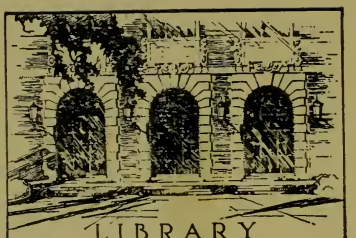

LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
P926f
v.1

THE FOREIGNERS

A Novel

BY

ELEANOR C. PRICE

AUTHORESS OF "A FRENCH HEIRESS," "VALENTINA," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1883

[*All rights reserved*]

PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO., LONDON AND KINGSTON.

823
P926f
v.1

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	—Landscape and Figures (French)	1
II.	—The Marquis and His Tutor	19
III.	—The Family of Brye	38
IV.	—A Sonnet	52
V.	—Françoise	70
VI.	—Foreigners	97
VII.	—Pauline's New Friend	122
VIII.	—Complications	136
IX.	—Among the Orange Trees	163
X.	—The Rich Aunt	184
XI.	—Through the Forest	219
XII.	—A Legitimist House	245
XIII.	—A Morning Walk	264
XIV.	—Dreams	282
XV.	—A Waking	305

THE FOREIGNERS.

CHAPTER I.

LANDSCAPE AND FIGURES (FRENCH).

ANY one who has listened to the croaking of French frogs through a summer night will feel that there was some excuse for the châtelaine in old times, who kept the peasants out of their beds when she was ill, to beat the ponds with sticks; for in these days of equality, when no one interferes with the frogs, and they can croak as they please, night is made hideous for people who live near ponds or marshy ground.

But in the dusk of evening, when the soft dark shadows are falling, and the old

château up above is beginning to glimmer with lights, there is something wild and romantic in that harsh music. It takes one back a hundred years or two, and reminds one how old France is, with all her young ideas. Her history still lives in these silent country places, where, far from Paris or any large town, the frogs croak, the owls hoot, the high-roofed towers stand up against the solemn evening sky. The peasants, grave and practical, with their quaint words and ways and superstitions, not caring much what the Government is, provided it gives them peace, are part of that old France too. They are free, but they work as hard now as they did a hundred years ago. Now it is for themselves, not their masters; that is the only difference.

In the low ground of the park at Maulévrier there were two or three ponds

leading one into another by rush-choked channels, the peaceful home of hundreds of frogs. These ponds were in a lonely place, down to the right of the avenue that led from the château to the village. They were haunted by rats and water-fowl; the ground about them was marshy and useless.

Madame de Maulévrier had an economical soul, and made as much profit on her land as she could, without spending much money. Most of the park was cultivated; the south-west slopes were turned into vineyards, the rest was divided into patches of wheat and maize, and other crops, while the part near the buildings was planted with apple and cherry trees, and a flock of sheep found their living among the rough wild grass that remained in the avenue under the green "charmillies," or alleys of clipped

elms, that stretched across the park in every direction.

One of Madame de Maulévrier's friends had lately given her a pair of Muscovy ducks, which took up their abode on the ponds. They had a little wooden house on the bank, where Mrs. Duck was expected to lay her eggs. But she preferred laying them among the rushes, in a place chosen by herself; the consequence was that the water-rats had an egg for breakfast every morning. This made Madame de Maulévrier very angry, and she ordered her farm people to catch the ducks every night and shut them up in their house.

It was a still cool June evening, and the scene would have delighted a French painter; so the one spectator thought, as he leaned against a tree, with his arms folded, and enjoyed it. The sky was gray and silver and gold, with great

soft lakes of clear and limpid blue. The broad shining surface of the pond mirrored the soft colours faithfully, except where the rushes stood up in slender groups, a bold frog or two croaking among their stalks, or the white duck made great rippling circles as she swam round and round to escape her persecutors; a man in a broad straw hat and a blouse, wading waist-deep among the rushes, and a woman, also dressed in blue, with a round white cap, and a long willow branch in her hand with which she lashed the water now and then, crying out, "Ah, cane!" in a monotonous musical drawl. In the background the lines of gray-green poplars and willows just rustled in the evening air, their leaves showing as they whispered the faintest silvery sheen. The peasant-woman's little girl of two years old, with a round brown

face, and black eyes staring, a small white cap covering her hair, and a blue frock down to her heels, stood grasping some railings on the near side of the pond, watching her mother with a rapt interest that led her to creep nearer and nearer to the water's edge.

Presently the duck glided into the rushes, and her pursuers moved cautiously along the bank to the further pond. The looker-on seemed at first to have some idea of following them, but his dark melancholy eyes rested on the child, and he remained standing where he was. The splash of the long willow wand was heard again in the next reach of shining water: "Ah, cane!" came, softened by distance, and the frogs near the bank where the young man and the child were standing began suddenly to croak in chorus. The little girl joined

her voice to theirs, and burst out crying plaintively, for she could no longer see even her mother's head over the forest of rushes. A momentary look of vexation crossed her companion's face: his next impulse brought him to the child's side. He stooped down, and took her small brown hand in his.

"Come, little one, you must not cry. Your mother will be back soon." The child stared at him in an amazement that conquered her terrors. Presently, as he stood high above her in the grass, she clutched at a button of his tan leggings, and, holding tight on to this refuge, began to chatter in her broken patois.

He looked down at her at first with a faint dreamy smile, of which even this little uncivilised creature felt the sweetness. Then his face became grave, and his eyes wandered away again

across the water. At last the man and woman were returning in triumph. Marie Mingot, smiling satirically, was carrying the duck by her long white wings.

"Ah, voyons!" said she. "What good have you done yourself by giving us all this trouble?—Merci bien, monsieur le Marquis! That child is a little fool: she must be always with her mother. Viens ici, Jeannette!"

She and her assistant had a few remarks to make on the business in hand. If madame la Marquise would have these ducks caught every evening, she must send a few more people down to do it. Voilà! Monsieur le Marquis had seen for himself what an affair it was. He listened without much concern, and presently began to stroll away up the hill, while the peasants with the child

moved slowly off in the direction of the farm where they lived. The frogs resumed their concert with much spirit as soon as these human intruders were gone.

A few yards up the hill, M. de Maulévrier met his mother, a small plainly-dressed woman, with a severely handsome face. He made her stop to look at the fading western sky, the soft refined tints of the landscape.

"I assure you," he said, "just now, when Jean and Marie were chasing the ducks round the pond, it was a scene worthy of Corot or Millet."

"I don't share your admiration for those people, my dear friend," said Madame de Maulévrier. "Did they catch the ducks? That is the question."

"Certainly. Did any bird or beast ever defy la Mingot? They are safe in

the house, and you will have your egg to-morrow morning."

"Very well."

Madame de Maulévrier took her son's arm, and they walked together towards the château, the tall grey roofs of which rose among the trees not far off. Coming up near the west side of the house, which faced north and south, they passed out of the park by a gate into a wild sort of garden, with beds of geraniums and roses on a wide lawn belted with trees and shrubberies, sweeping green slopes falling to the park wall of white crumbly stone. To the south, beyond the alleys of the park, the view ended in a broad dark mass of forest, which stretched away over the hills for miles. Madame de Maulévrier sat down on her favourite bench, which stood near the edge of this lawn, under an old lime-tree,

whose flowers were just beginning to breathe sweetness in the air. Two nightingales were singing a duet in the shrubbery, among the acacias and laurels and young drooping fir-trees. Here Gérard de Maulévrier had sat with his mother thousands of times since the day that she carried him out in her arms, that first baby with his dark eyes, so much dearer to her than any that had followed him. He was now a man of five-and-twenty, tall, dark, and pale, with a long brown moustache, and an air of distinguished grace which somehow blended with his melancholy, and made it seem only natural. Some people said he was a man of the last century, born out of his time; but these were not the people who knew him best. Not that he had any very intimate friends; his mother's claims upon him were too large

to leave a fair share for any one else. It was a great pity for Gérard. But Madame de Maulévrier of course did not see that; and he submitted, for he was gentle, and loved his mother.

"Now let us finish our talk," said the Marquise. "You understood all I was saying before dinner, and agreed with me. There are two things to be considered, our party and our family. The same rule holds good in both cases. Here am I, unfortunate woman, with four sons, an income of 40,000 francs, and a house of this size. It is impossible that more than one of you should marry, and for that we must arrange things prudently."

Madame de Maulévrier seldom did her sons the honour of consulting them. She generally gave her orders, and was obeyed without question. To-day there

was a slight hesitation in her manner, though her words were positive enough. She was looking rather anxiously at Gérard, who was stooping forward, his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Oui, ma mère," he said, with a slight sigh.

"About your brothers it does not matter," Madame de Maulévrier went on. "They have their profession, their little allowance; they can be here as much as they please. They must consent to my arrangements. How can you live here, how can you marry, without some family sacrifice? In these times a young man is much better without a wife, unless, like you, he is the head of the house. What are you thinking of? Are you pitying your brothers?"

"My brothers are such good boys," said Gérard, "that they would give

up everything to me without a single grimace. I do not like these arrangements. But, of course, for the king and for one's family, a sacrifice has to be made. Only, my dear mother, why should I be the one to benefit by it?"

"Because you are in your right place, and will remain there. And when the Maulévriers have been Gérard, fils de Gérard, for so many generations, do you think I am going to let you break the chain? Besides, my friend, what would become of you if you did not marry? You to live on here, with no interests, growing older and older, a mere useless brother, while Victor's or Léon's children tyrannised over everything! No, not while I live!"

"I should be a useless hanger-on, you are right," said Gérard, sadly. "I must marry, then. But I suppose there is no

hurry. I may wait—to find a woman that I can love, and who will be a good daughter to you?"

Madame de Maulévrier looked a little disturbed, and did not at once reply to this speech.

"I wish you would be reasonable," she said presently, "and more like your father. He had the best heart in the world, and we were the closest of friends. But that nonsense of love before marriage was never so much as dreamt of in our days. Leave that to the poets, my poor Gérard, and to people without breeding or self-control. Or, if you must have this little amusement, fall in love at once with Mademoiselle de Brye."

"Mademoiselle de Brye!"

"Certainly. Who else?"

Madame de Maulévrier and her son had had conversations before on this subject,

but they had never gone quite so far, or become so painfully practical.

Gérard first frowned, then smiled incredulously. His mother was looking at him with a sort of imperious impatience.

"But—Mademoiselle de Brye!" he repeated. "She is a child, is she not? Pardon, ma mère—but hers is the last name that would have occurred to me."

"That is strange enough," said Madame de Maulévrier, "when I have known for years that my son would and could marry no one else. She is an only child; their lands join ours; it will be an advantage to them as well as to us. We can meet them on equal terms—I think of that, if you do not. Perhaps you would prefer marrying the daughter of some nouveau riche—some man who began life behind a counter? You will be the first Maulévrier who has distinguished himself

in that way. The family of Brye is as old as our own. They are excellent people."

"Excellent people!" repeated Gérard, in despairing acquiescence.

After a few minutes of silence Madame de Maulévrier got up, and walked towards the broad flight of stone steps, stained with brown moss, which led to the garden door of the château. Before she reached them she turned round, and with the same steady firm step came back to Gérard.

"Are you the first person," she said, "who has had to give up his own fancies for the good of his family? We cannot get rid of our duties in this world. You young people talk of happiness in your childish way. I tell you it is only to be found in doing one's duty. Come! Are you going to sit moping here all the evening, my son?"

Gérard roused himself at once, got up, and kissed his mother's hand. She did not give him any embrace in return, or speak to him again as he followed her into the house.

Mademoiselle de Brye was put aside for that evening. The Marquise sat and knitted in her large arm-chair, near a window of the great cold-looking salon. Gérard read out articles from the *Union* and the *Figaro*. Over the darkening fields and woods brooded the deep silence of the country, broken only by the frogs as they croaked their evening hymn.

CHAPTER II.

THE MARQUIS AND HIS TUTOR.

THERE were many things that united to make Gérard de Maulévrier sad. For instance, he had a passionate love for his country, but it was that of a Catholic and a Legitimist; and he had not the hopefulness which makes some of his party smile when they read in some well-informed newspaper that their cause is dead and buried. He had been terribly grieved, when quite a lad, by his mother's refusal to let him go and fight the Germans; the boy, with all his gentleness, was a soldier by nature; and the whole story of that war, which he was obliged to watch from a distance, was a

wound to his spirit that had never been healed. Since those days he had served his year in the army like other young men, and would gladly have made it his profession, but Madame de Maulévrier, to whom this had been a year of misery, refused her consent, and insisted on his living at home. That life, except in the sporting season, was a very monotonous one. Gérard's brothers wondered how he could endure it. Two of them were in the army, and the youngest was in the navy. They admired their eldest brother, but had not much in common with him, and all three had a wholesome awe of their mother, to whom modern ideas of spoiling one's children were quite unknown.

Gérard was happy with his mother, who gave him all the love in her heart. She had not wanted the others. It

seemed right and natural that everything should be given up to him. Yet, in his low-spirited moments, which were many, the young Marquis thought himself an unfortunate man. Their poverty tried him then—the difficulty of keeping up a great place like Maulévrier, in the roughest and simplest way, on an income not much exceeding 1,500*l.* a year. Madame de Maulévrier managed this, however, and a good deal more besides, to which the curé of her village could have borne witness. Gerard had not much to do with it; yet, when he thought of these things, they troubled him. And now he was to marry Mademoiselle de Brye.

He lay awake that night with a new oppression on his mind, a new anxiety, a new cause of endless ennui. To do him justice, he did not forget to be sorry for

the girl who was to marry him. Of course there was no escape, no way out of it; his mother would arrange it all, probably without consulting him any more. There was only one hope, that Monsieur and Madame de Brye would not consider him a sufficiently good match for their daughter. But no, his mother had most likely sounded them already. So Gérard resigned himself, yawned several times, went to sleep, and slept till the sun had long been pouring in through the chinks of his shutters, and his coffee was waiting for him on the table.

Every morning, summer and winter, Madame de Maulévrier went to the seven o'clock mass at the village church. She did not expect her son to go with her; every one at the château was independent till eleven o'clock, when the breakfast bell rang. To be late or absent

then, or at dinner, was a serious crime. Till eleven the Marquise was always busy with housekeeping or farming, or some benevolent work. She and her son seldom met before breakfast, for Gérard often spent the morning reading or writing in his own room.

This morning he was restless, and went out early, taking a short cut to the village through a corner of the park where they were making hay. It was a brilliant June day, the air dazzlingly clear, the sky shining deep blue behind the motionless trees—one of those faultless days that seem to have found their way from Paradise into this world of disturbed weather, of clouds and storms, and disappointments. Gérard was much influenced by weather, but even this sunshine could not give any hopeful life to the idea of Mademoiselle de Brye.

She had been educated at a Paris convent, and he had not seen her since she was a child; but it was impossible—impossible—that the daughter of Monsieur and Madame de Brye should be interesting.

This young man had made his own romantic ideal of a wife. She was to be beautiful and stately and gracious; religious, and yet liberal-minded—for Gérard's religion was rather of the *dilettante* kind; such a perfect friend that her husband could tell her every thought of his heart without fear of being misjudged or misunderstood. Gérard had once confided some of these ideas to his next brother, Victor, who, with a fine knowledge of the world, had smiled, and asked whether it was possible that such a woman existed. These cynical notions were horrible to Gérard, and since then

he had kept his visions to himself. It was true that, as he grew older, and now and then saw young ladies who had points of resemblance with each other, but none with his ideal, he began to think that perhaps he should never meet with her, and in that case he would never marry. But now duty, and that stern power of fact which is always waiting to pounce upon the happy sleeper and shake him out of his dreams, had come to Gérard in the shape of his mother, saying, "You must marry Mademoiselle de Brye."

He stopped a few minutes in the meadow to talk to the mowers—picturesque fellows, who travelled from place to place for work, with their dark southern faces, blue linen clothes hanging loose on their lanky frames, and enormous brown rush hats worked with scarlet braid. One of

them, the wag of the party, kept the others laughing whenever they stopped to whet their scythes. Gérard half wished he could change places with that light-hearted fellow, full of his country jokes, which yet had nothing coarse or unpleasant about them. After standing there among the freshly-cut grass for a few minutes, and enjoying a laugh, which did him good, and made him forget his fate for the moment, Gérard wished them good-day and left them, going rather more cheerfully on his way to the village.

Maulévrier was a long, straggling place, the centre of life to a wild, lonely wooded country. The houses were scattered prettily among orchards and small fields, and a bright stream, crossed by two or three bridges, ran winding through the village, reflecting rows of willows and

poplars, and turning a mill at the end. The church stood on high ground above the road and the stream. It had a tower and low wooden spire at the west end. The hillside was covered with small crosses, many of which were hung with bead wreaths and immortelles. Near the broad steps stood a tall iron crucifix, looking down upon the road. Just opposite the churchyard, a green barred gate, always open, led into the garden of the Presbytère. A trellised walk of vines went straight up to the door, and then branched off into a verandah along the front of the house, where the sun shone through the vine-leaves on a worn stone pavement, and a small table and chairs stood by the curé's study-window. There was a square of vegetables and fruit-trees on each side of the garden, divided by the neatest little gravel paths,

and bordered with rows of white and tiger lilies, and pink roses in long sprays and clusters. The house-door opened into a narrow passage painted blue, on one side of which was the study, lined with book-shelves; on the other, the bare little dining-room. Altogether there was something warm and smiling and sunny about the Presbytère; it looked like a home of studious peace. A large white cat with long hair was lying on the doorstep; she got up, with an air of dignified ease, to welcome the young Marquis. Her master, hearing footsteps, called out from the study,

"Is that you, Gérard? Come in, my child."

The curé of Maulévrier was a remarkable man in the province. He had a story, but no one quite knew what it was. Some strange circumstances, it was

plain, must have brought him into that lonely village and kept him there, for he was not of the stuff of which country priests are usually made. He was a scholar and a man of the world, though for the twenty years of his life here he had been a hermit, avoiding every one but his own people. He had acted as tutor to Madame de Maulévrier's sons; Gérard, in fact, had had no other, for his mother could not bring herself to send him to college. But she knew that his education, as far as books went, was quite safe in Monsieur Olivier's hands; and, for the rest, she had a perfect confidence in herself and in Gérard's natural tastes.

The Curé rose up from behind his desk, and held out his hand to Gérard with a hearty greeting. He was a tall, thin man of fifty-five, with curly gray

hair, a long nose, and quick, pleasant dark eyes. After wishing him good-morning, Gérard sat down in one of the hard wooden chairs and stared at the red-tiled floor.

"Well, my friend, have you had bad dreams?" said the Curé.

"I wish it was only a dream," said Gérard, looking up. "You know all about it, monsieur, no doubt—the torment that is in store for me. I cannot be left in peace. I must marry—you probably know that I am to marry Mademoiselle de Brye."

"I neither hear nor understand you," said the Curé, "when you speak in that tone of a young lady."

Gerard blushed scarlet and did not answer.

"I will just remark in passing," said Monsieur Olivier, "that the young lady

is charming—far too good for a young fellow without manners, like you."

"Ah, I don't doubt that in the least," said Gérard. "But my present wish is, not to marry at all."

"That must be a great grief to madame your mother, who has arranged everything for years past with a view to your marriage."

"Yes, I know. I am to be king of everything. Victor, Léon, and Jules are to give up all their rights to me; they are to have no fortune, are not to marry, are in fact to be sacrificed, that I may have all. I detest it!" exclaimed Gérard, starting up and beginning to walk about the room.

"What is it that you detest, my friend?" said M. Olivier, leaning his chin on his hand, and watching his former pupil with a faint smile.

"The whole thing. And especially this hateful cheating of the law. That says we are to divide the property equally. I am right, am I not? That is the law of France. What business then have we with these family arrangements?"

"The Code Napoléon—yes, that is no doubt the law of France," said M. Olivier. "But you will not be cheating the law, for people are allowed to renounce their succession if they choose. And if madame your mother wishes it, your brothers will agree to do it."

"It is very hard on them," said Gérard.

"Now, consider a little. Look at the plain facts, and do not distract me by marching about like a caged tiger."

Gérard threw himself into his chair again. "I know the plain facts well

enough, dear Monsieur," he said with a sigh. "My mother has often explained them to me."

"Hear them once more," said the Curé. "Madame de Maulévrier has managed the estate up to this time, through many difficulties. She has done her best—you little know, you lazy selfish boy, all that madame your mother has done. But still, if the property is to be divided into four parts, it would have to be sold; there is no other way. You will none of you have enough to marry on, your old family will die out, you will be parted from the old place whose name you have borne for ten centuries, the Church and the King will lose one of their strongholds, and they have too few! Well, Gérard, I knew a family in the South whose circumstances were the same. There were four young

men—their parents were both dead. I need not go into the whole story—but they chose the youngest to marry, and gave up all their claims to him. They are old men now, but their respectable family still exists in the old house of their fathers."

"The youngest married, you say. Then why—" began Gérard, and paused.

"Your mother's heart clings to you," said the Curé, gravely. "What is this new rage against marrying? Suppose that the lady proposed to you was the very person you admired beyond all others—would you be so anxious then, my friend, to screen yourself behind the injury done to your brothers?"

"You make me out very base," said Gérard, half indignantly.

"Not at all. Only very young. And young people are apt to think

that there is nothing in the world but themselves and their happiness. You wish Victor or Léon to marry this lady who is too good for any of you, and because you transfer your rights to him you will think yourself a hero of self-sacrifice. We are all alike, my poor Gérard."

The young man was flushed, and moved uneasily; but there was something in M. Olivier's voice and eyes which made it impossible to be angry.

"What is the use of talking about it?" he said presently, in a low voice. "My mother will arrange it all. Let us leave the subject."

"Certainly. Let us talk about our dear Léon. I hear he is quartered at Tourlyon."

"Yes. I am going to see him next week," said Gérard.

Léon was evidently a favourite of M. Olivier's; he spoke of him with great affection. After a time Gérard asked suddenly whether M. de Brye had not a house at Tourlyon.

"Exactly. A pretty house in the outskirts of the town. They spend a good deal of time there," said the Curé.

"Dear monsieur, I was not even aware that you knew them."

"I know them very little except by report," said the Curé. "Now it is my breakfast time, so you had better go home, unless you will breakfast with me."

Gérard thanked him, but that was impossible; so he left his old tutor to his bread and vegetables, for it was Friday, and set out on his walk back to the château. He had not, apparently, gained much by his visit. Still it was a melancholy satisfaction, and helped him a little

in the way of resignation, to find that his two oracles were agreed. M. Olivier said just the same things as his mother, only in different words. And by these two his life had hitherto been guided.

CHAPTER III.

THE FAMILY OF BRYE.

ON Sunday afternoon, two young men, one in the uniform of a line regiment, were walking along the Boulevard at Tourlyon, about thirty miles from the old château where Gérard Maulévrier's life dragged so slowly on. Neither of them were much over twenty, and they were very much alike, except that the elder of the two was darker in complexion than his brother, and had the look and bearing of an older man than he really was. They were not nearly so handsome as Gérard, but far more lively and spirited-looking; and the younger one, who wore the uniform, had something of Gérard's

smile. They were his two brothers, Victor and Lèon de Maulévrier. They walked along talking rather gravely, having just read a letter that Victor was holding in his hand. Down below them, beyond the trees, lay the river Yonne—not the Yonne that most people know—broad and glittering in the sun. A military band was playing in the distance, the cathedral bells were chiming the hour. On the seats under the trees were men in their Sunday clothes, young smiling peasant girls, dear old grandmothers in black gowns and white plaited caps, watching over the games of little crop-headed children. The brothers also had been sitting for a few minutes on a bench, talking over their family affairs, but when they were joined by one of these good women and her young charge, they got up and walked on.

"I know they live here sometimes,"

said Léon. "I remember how they used to go away to Tourlyon, and how little Fanni used to cry at leaving us. There was a time when she and I loved each other furiously, with passion. Then she preferred Jules, and I longed to shoot him. Gérard was too old and wise, and he always liked better to stay at home, besides, with maman. And you—"

"Ah, my friend, do you pretend to forget my part in the business?" said Victor. "When I was available, you and Jules were nowhere. She was a little coquette in those days, Mademoiselle Fanni, but she had very good taste. How old is she now? Eighteen? When I saw her last she was a great girl in a pinafore, and I did not even look at her. Little I thought that she would be my sister-in-law. It is a very good arrangement. But I wonder that my mother can

bear to part with even so much of Gérard."

"Do you think they will be married in Paris?" said Léon.

"You run too fast, mon cher; it is still in the clouds. Who is this good man with the eyeglass? He seems to admire your handsome uniform."

An elderly man, fat and dark, with a large white waistcoat, was slowly approaching in the shade of the trees. At a little distance he might have been a grocer, but as he came near one perceived that he was a gentleman.

"Hush!" muttered Léon. "Don't you know him?"

As they met him, Léon took off his hat, and Victor, with sudden recognition, did the same. The good man put up his hand to his own, slowly and doubtfully.

"We have the honour of speaking to M. le Comte de Brye?" said Victor.

"Oui, monsieur."

"You have forgotten us, monsieur. We are Maulévriers—Victor and Léon. We have not forgotten you—and days at the Maison Blanche."

"My dear young fellows, I beg you a thousand pardons!" exclaimed the Comte. "I am blind and stupid. I grow an old man; and you were boys when I saw you last. Yet your family is constantly in my thoughts, and it was only last week that I had a letter from madame your mother. How is she, may I ask? As beautiful as ever?"

Victor replied by equally polite inquiries for Madame and Mademoiselle de Brye. M. de Brye, with an air of sincere friendliness, begged them to come into his house, which was close by.

The ladies would be delighted to see them, he said. Nothing could have pleased the young men better. They went in with him, through a bright and beautifully-kept garden, to a large white house built against the side of the hill, with a magnolia growing over the front of it. Up beyond the house a broad terrace with an alley of lime-trees ran level with the first floor; higher still was the tender green background of a vineyard. Through an arch, made by the large trees in the garden, the house had a view of the cathedral towers beyond the river and a range of far blue hills.

Monsieur de Brye took his friends into a low square salon, filled with beautiful Louis Quinze furniture, with groups of flowering plants standing in the windows. There was an air of

wealth and comfort about the place; old possessions, and yet a spirit of modern convenience that was almost Parisian, and not often found in an old provincial family.

The ladies came in almost directly. Madame de Brye was tall, thin, and pale; her manner seemed half timid, half indifferent, yet there was something interesting about her, and this, whatever it was, her daughter had inherited. She was shy and not exactly pretty, though her large soft eyes had an attractiveness of their own. Very slight, and a good deal shorter than her mother, but yet not insignificant, from a certain delicacy and refinement in her looks and movements. Both ladies were fashionably dressed, but without much taste of their own, and neither of them had much to say. Madame de Brye,

most unlike a Frenchwoman, left all the talk and entertaining to her husband, who prosed away steadily.

The two young men glanced rather curiously at Françoise, as her parents called her; she sat close to her mother, and did not speak unless she was spoken to. The change from their playfellow, Fanni, of a few years ago, was great indeed. Yet now and then Victor caught a stolen glance under those long eyelashes, which convinced him that the young girl had not forgotten her childhood.

"You seldom come to Maison Blanche now, madame," he said. "It is a great loss to my mother."

"It is a grief to me, indeed, not to see more of Madame de Maulévrier," said Madame de Brye, in soft even tones, "But that poor Maison Blanche is so

far, you see, from civilisation. I do not know how we ever lived there at all. Lately we have spent our time here or in Paris, or at my old home in the south."

"Mademoiselle has still a little love left for the Maison Blanche?" suggested Victor, looking at Françoise, who coloured slightly and bowed her head.

"Yes; she was born there. We naturally love our birthplace," said Madame de Brye.

The faintest quiver of a smile showed itself in Mademoiselle de Brye's mouth and eyes.

"I love the old woods," she said, half under her breath.

"And the primroses, mademoiselle, and the wild honeysuckle?" said Victor gently, looking at her. "We shall never find such treasures again."

"They grow there still, no doubt," said M. de Brye. "Yes, my friends, I have made up my mind. We spend August and September at the Maison Blanche, perhaps October too. We shall renew acquaintance with all our old friends, especially at the Château de Maulévrier. That will be charming. Our little Fanni can gather primroses and honeysuckle—"

"No, papa—blackberries and mushrooms," murmured his daughter.

"Bien, mon enfant; whatever you please. You and I, my friends, will have shooting-parties, and your eldest brother will join us. Is he a good shot?"

"Certainly, monsieur. Gérard is a great sportsman."

After twenty minutes of this sort of talk, the young men took their leave.

Monsieur de Brye, with expressions of the warmest hospitality, walked with them to the gate on the boulevard. He had already asked them to dinner the next day.

"Then," he said, "we will talk politics, and give our opinions on the Republic. Ah, I have some droll stories to tell you, and a dog to show you. Such a dog! He makes no secret of his opinions. He will bring us into trouble one of these days, when it is treason to be Royalist. I shall have to disown him, and that will not be so easy."

"Ah, no, monsieur. Give him to me, if you find him dangerous," said Léon.

M. de Brye laughed.

"Well," he said, "I am very glad to have seen you both, and I beg, my dear Léon, that you will make use of

my house as if I was a relation. Bring your friends with you. I like young men."

Léon began to thank him, but he waved his hands in the air, and would not listen.

"Bah! it is not worth thanks. And, besides, it is not entirely for your sake." He looked hard at Léon, and then at Victor, who ventured to reply with a glance of intelligence. "You understand me? You interest me very much at this moment, for the sake of your family."

"I expect Gérard here next week, monsieur," said Léon, in his simple way.

"Ah—well," said the Comte, smiling, as he stood at his gate, "I mentioned just now a little correspondence with madame your mother. She has promised me certain explanations. I

shall, no doubt, receive them before your brother comes. A demain, my dear friends, au plaisir!"

"What a funny old man!" said Léon, as they walked away.

Victor was rather thoughtful.

"They are old-fashioned, of course," he said, "but he is a respectable old fellow, and Madame de Brye is distinguished, in her provincial way."

"I should not have known Mademoiselle Fanni," said Léon.

"I should. She is just what she promised to be. All the old spirit is there—the something, I do not know what, that made her so attractive. By-and-by, you will see, she will come out astonishingly. At present, of course, she is tied hand and foot. She will develop—but I don't know what Gérard will do with her."

"You admire her, then," said Léon, with a note of surprise in his voice.

"Yes, I admire her."

"I suppose M. de Brye means to consent, from what he said."

"He is not yet quite sure about the business part of the matter. My mother has not explained to him, probably, that her younger sons are to renounce their succession. When he hears that he will be satisfied."

Léon's mind was neither thoughtful nor suspicious enough to detect the touch of bitterness in these words.

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

CHAPTER IV.

A SONNET.

MADAME DE MAULÉVRIER had known very well what to expect from her three younger sons. Either of them might have insisted on his rights, and refused to give the promise she asked for, which would deprive him, in his elder brother's favour, of everything but a small pittance. But they all seemed to agree that this course was impossible. The sacrifice was necessary, and it was made as Gérard had prophesied, without a grimace. Madame de Maulévrier was able to write a satisfactory letter to Monsieur de Brye, and when his answer, full of friendly

compliments, reached the château, it was time for Gérard to present himself to his future wife and her family. No formal arrangements were to be made till Monsieur and Madame de Brye came to the Maison Blanche, which was not distant more than a league from Maulévrier. Then the respective parents would meet, and things would be finally concluded; in the meantime the engagement was an understood thing.

Early one morning, when the valleys were full of white mist, and the sun, already high, was slowly drinking the dew; when people and animals were just going forth to their work, Gérard and his mother stood in the high doorway of the château, waiting for the carriage that was to take him to Tourlyon.

A broad flight of steps descended

into a large grass court surrounded by a carriage-drive. Opposite were the tall iron gates, once bright with gilded flourishes, now tarnished and rusty. They stood open, and through them one looked straight down the stately double avenue of limes, bright above in the morning sunlight, that played among the gold-green leaves, dark and cool in the shade below, where the road ran slightly sloping down to the village. Close to the head of the avenue, between these grand old trees, the road to the stable-yard branched off to the right. The steps and the front of the house were in shadow, but long, broad rays of sun fell across the court, where two or three dogs were playing. The shutters of many of the windows were still closed. The old valet de chambre, in his large apron, was standing with

his master's baggage at the foot of the steps.

In Madame de Maulévrier's handsome face, as she looked up at her son, there was a certain exultation. Not that she much enjoyed the prospect of a daughter-in-law; but Gérard's marriage had been a subject of thought and anxiety for several years, and she was convinced that without her spirited management, which committed him before he knew where he was, it might have been put off for more years still. She had waited for Jules to pass his twenty-first birthday, so that all difficulties about succession might be settled at once, and then she had begun her correspondence with M. de Brye, never thinking of treating the two young people as anything but puppets, to be moved here and there for the pleasure of those who held the strings.

Mademoiselle de Brye would have been a good match for anybody; and nothing could be more fortunate than her marrying Gérard. The properties joined, running into each other in all directions. The Marquis de Maulévrier had always held a good position in his province, which would now be vastly improved; and Gérard, though not a very careful young man, was free from the extravagance that had ruined his father and grandfather.

"I have seen you look more cheerful when you started for a wolf-hunt," said Madame de Maulévrier, after watching her son for a minute or two. There was a weary indifference about him that provoked her. He stood with his hat in his hand, leaning against the doorpost, his eyes fixed absently on some distant point in the avenue.

"Well, mother, one comes back from a wolf-hunt, and things are the same."

She had spoken with a little irritation, but his answer was so gentle in its sadness that her heart was touched, and the tears rushed into her eyes.

"But, Gérard," she said, "things shall always be the same for you here, as long as I live. Do you think I will let any one come between you and me? My son, if I had nothing to think of but myself, should not we live on as we have lived all these years?"

"Then, mother, once more," said Gérard, seizing her hands, as a distant tinkle announced the carriage, "will you not put one of the others in my place? Listen: let it be Victor."

"No, no; no one can take your place. There, that is enough—you torment me.

Some day you will thank me, my poor boy. Adieu!"

The carriage drove up, a high four-wheeled dog-cart with a pair of bays. Gérard took the reins and drove off, waving his hat to his mother as they whirled through the gates. The harness bells jingled merrily, the dogs barked as they were called and driven back, the carriage flashed away down the avenue. Madame de Maulévrier turned into the hall to take up her paroissien, which was lying on a table there, and presently set off on her walk to the early mass.

It was a very long round to reach Tourlyon from Maulévrier by rail. Though the distance by road was only thirty miles, or about thirteen leagues and a half, the wanderings of those cross-country lines, and the slowness and fewness of the trains upon them, made

it almost a day's journey. Thus the lords of Maulévrier kept up their old fashion of driving to Tourlyon, and when, as now, they meant to be some days absent, the horses stayed one night at the town, and went back to the château the next day. In the same way they met their master on his return.

After mass, Madame de Maulévrier talked to her friend the Curé, and they rejoiced together that Gérard was gone.

"He was growing too poetic, too sensitive, our dear young Marquis," said the Curé. "I am glad he is plunged into real life at last."

"You have said those things before, Monsieur le Curé," said Madame de Maulévrier, looking at him gravely. "I could never see, for my part, that young men were the better for being thrown into the world early. Certainly you

might search very far before you found a character more perfect than Gérard's. He is only too good."

"No doubt," the Curé agreed. "But these new responsibilities will bring out his goodness, and strengthen his character."

"I fervently hope they will not change him in any way."

The Marquise wished her old friend good-morning rather shortly, and walked away.

"Poor woman!" he said, as he looked after her. "And yet I know who one should pity most."

Madame de Maulévrier was not at all accustomed to give way to her feelings. She had insisted on Gérard's going, though she knew well that she would be miserable when he was gone; and the Curé might well pity her, for there was not a

more unhappy woman among his flock that day. Before going back to the château, she paid her almost daily visit to the little hospital she had established in the village, besides visiting one or two sick people in their own homes. When she got home at last she was hot and tired, and it was not nearly eleven o'clock. She went upstairs, and into Gérard's room, which was at the far end of the long corridor.

Everything there was monotonously tidy; the valet de chambre had been hard at work arranging it. His books were in the shelves; his piano was shut, and the music lay in a neat pile; his bed, in a recess, was carefully veiled in its cretonne cover and long sweeping curtains; his arm-chair, of a low and lazy shape, stood by one of the windows, the shutters of which were closed. Madame de Maulévrier went up and

opened them; the sunshine streamed in across the shining floor, which had just been diligently frotté.

It was a grand wild view on which Gérard's windows looked. From this high point, the château seemed to be surrounded with forests. There were trees everywhere, clustering thick together, their branches heavy with the leaves of June. The country seemed to flow in waves, up and down; the village of Maulévrier lay in the nearest valley, its roofs just showing among the green. Beyond it there were steeper slopes, where the woods were chiefly fir and larch. Here and there a bright-coloured vineyard lay on the side of a hill. La Maison Blanche, M. de Brye's house, was hidden away in the woods to the right. As far as eyes could reach to the north-east, the landscape was

nothing but rising and falling masses of wood; there on the horizon a yellow line divided them, crossing the top of the farthest hill. This was the road to Tourlyon, and the first and last place, on that side, from which one saw the Château de Maulévrier. From there it looked like a stately house indeed, its gray towers standing high among the woods, as if it ruled them all.

Madame de Maulévrier stood long at the window, and gazed at that distant half-mile of road, which her son had passed not long before. Presently her eyes felt a little dim with gazing at that one spot, and she let them wander over the woods, forgetting any little misgivings that might have troubled her in the pleasant thoughts they brought to her mind. All this would be Gérard's some day. The Maulévrier estate had grown

smaller by degrees, while M. de Brye's enlarged itself. Now the old name, the oldest in the country, would have its rightful preëminence again. It would have been too absurd to let Gérard's fancies interfere with such a prospect as this. As she stood at the window, thinking of the success of her plan, of her darling's bright future, of the obstacles she had overcome, of all the improvements that she would make at Maulévrier one of these days, a smile lighted up her stern face, for she felt proud of all she had done for Gérard. Then, suddenly remembering that she was wasting time here, she turned and looked round the room once more.

She was not often troubled, in her practical life, with sentimental subjective thinking, but now, as she looked round at his possessions, it crossed her mind

to wonder whether this son of hers would ever understand how she loved him, how nothing in the world mattered to her except his well-doing, his health and comfort and prosperity. He might well trust her to arrange his life for him, she thought; if ever a woman's whole powers ewre devoted to one object, hers were devoted to making him happy. Within certain limits—most young men would have found them very narrow ones—he lived as he pleased. He had plenty of accomplishments—music, drawing, languages—for which he had an unusual gift. His mother understood none of these things; with her stern views of life she thought them trifling, if not dangerous. His father had been singularly accomplished, and singularly unsatisfactory, in spite of having, as she confessed, the best heart in the world.

She did not wish Gérard to be like his father.

Yet she was sometimes a little proud of his talents; as now, when no one was there to see her, she walked up to the book-case and looked at the names of his books, French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, besides Latin and Greek; the best writers of every country, and especially the poets, were collected together in this young man's room. His mother glanced along the shelves, and shrugged her shoulders slightly as she turned away.

The writing-table stood close by, with its large literary-looking inkstand and blotting-book. Madame de Maulévrier raised the cover of the blotting-book. At the moment she did not think what she was doing, but her eyes fell on a sheet of paper written over, and still damp, as if

it had been lately written and hastily blotted. Across the top were the words "A mon Rêve," the title of a sonnet which followed them, and ended with the signature "De M." In these lines Gérard had written his farewell to his ideal, the dream-lady that he had hoped to find some day. He knew now what he had feared and suspected before, that she was only a vision—yet, unworthy follower as he was of the great Dante, he hoped to find his Beatrice one day, in the country of realised dreams, of aspirations crowned. There he must look for the true life that was denied him here.

The sonnet was pretty and poetical enough, but any merits that it might have had were quite thrown away on Madame de Maulévrier. Neither did she in the least understand the motive of

it. It seemed plain to her that Gérard was in love with somebody; evidently a person he could not hope to marry. Who she was must remain a mystery. The Marquise thought over all her son's acquaintance, but could not satisfy herself, for Gérard had never expressed much admiration of any of them. It must be somebody he did not dare to mention to his mother.

Madame de Maulévrier was deeply wounded; her confidence in Gérard seemed to be slipping away. She sat down by the writing-table, with her eyes fixed on that unfortunate sheet of paper.

The time passed so quickly, as she sat there thinking of this unpleasant discovery, that she was quite startled by hearing the church-clock strike eleven, and the breakfast-bell clang out after it.

She stood up, with the paper in her hand, half inclined to tear it in two, and throw it into the waste-paper basket. But more honourable counsels prevailed. She read the sonnet once again, muttered to herself, "Mon Dieu, quelle bêtise!" laid it back in Gérard's blotting-book, closed his shutters again carefully, and left the room.

CHAPTER V.

FRANÇOISE.

IF Madame de Maulévrier had only known it, her son had written a real farewell in those lines that disturbed her so much—a farewell to the playtime of life. They were his confession that he had been dreaming long enough, that now it was time to put sleep from him, and to do the work, such as it was, that lay before him in the world. When he wrote them, Gérard had made up his mind to accept the inevitable. His resolution had failed a little at the moment of going, but it became strong again in the long lonely drive to Tourlyon.

His spirits rose as he drove through

those sweet-scented forest ways, where the horses started at every shadow, where now and then a deer bounded across the road, or some wild bird fluttered away in the underwood. No other living creature was to be met for miles, except, perhaps, a party of wood-cutters, or a garde champêtre with his dogs, whose work led them deep into the forest.

The good horses with their light load brought their master to Tourlyon in time for a late breakfast. As he drove through the streets of the beautiful old town, with its shining river and church towers and picturesque houses, under a deep blue sky that gave its full effect to every colour and shadow, his artist soul was delighted, and he did not feel any shrinking from his fellow creatures who made the life and movement of those

streets. When he turned into the yard of the Couronne, the old well-known hotel, it was pleasant to find his brothers waiting there to welcome him.

Victor had a long leave just now. He meant to come to Maulévrier by-and-by to see his mother; but at present it was more amusing to stay at the Tourlyon hotel, spending his time with Léon and his brother officers or at M. de Brye's pretty house, where he was made very welcome. He thought it only right, he told Léon, to cultivate these people, who were so soon to be relations.

"We shall expect madame our sister-in-law to make Maulévrier pleasant to us, one of these days," he said. "One cannot be too polite beforehand."

Léon, whose colonel was a martinet, had not so much time for paying visits to his friends.

It was Victor who went with Gérard that afternoon to M. de Brye's, entertaining him on the way with praises of the Brye family. Gérard listened with interest. He had made up his mind to like them, these "excellent people," and to make Mdlle. Françoise like him, if that was possible. He was very modest about himself, and not at all aware of his own attractiveness. Such looks as his might have charmed much more experienced people than Mdlle. de Brye.

She scarcely lifted her eyes when he was introduced to her, and did not speak, but blushed faintly and glanced at her mother when he kissed her hand. Monsieur and Madame de Brye both seemed delighted; the stiff silent lady found smiles for Gérard, who hardly knew himself as he sat there making

agreeable speeches to her and her husband. Victor sat a little apart, and smiled under his moustache. Could that be moping old Gérard, that splendid fellow with his grand seigneur air, talking to these good folks with such animation, as if their opinion was of immense consequence to him? Both young men, Victor perhaps oftener than Gérard, let their eyes wander towards Mdlle. Françoise, their chief object of interest, who sat there demurely looking on the floor. Victor's glances were curious, eager, sympathetic; Gérard's merely polite and deferential; but both were thrown away.

M. de Brye was full of benevolence. He called his poodle, and made him perform various tricks to amuse the visitors.

"Qu'est-ce qu'on fait quand on parle politique?" demanded the master of this

clever animal, who instantly yawned in the most dismal and depressing manner. At the word "République," he rolled over on his back and lay helpless. After this he descended to more commonplace tricks, such as sitting up with a pipe in his mouth and a newspaper in his paws. These performances went on in the middle of the salon, M. de Brye presiding with the greatest animation, while his wife sat by and smiled, the visitors laughed and admired, and Françoise looked a little bored. In the middle of the pipe and newspaper exhibition, Gérard met her eyes, and was struck by their expression; but she instantly looked away from him again. There was a certain sadness in that momentary glance that haunted and troubled him.

Presently Madame de Brye invited

them all into the garden to see her orange-trees in flower. Monsieur de Brye seized the opportunity to take Gérard aside, and thank him in majestic terms for the honour he had done him in asking for his daughter.

"On the contrary, monsieur," said Gérard; "I owe you a thousand thanks for the honour you do me, and for receiving me so kindly."

Monsieur de Brye bowed and smiled.

"I shall wait impatiently," said Gérard in a low voice, "for my answer."

"You need not be anxious on that point," said Monsieur de Brye; "my daughter knows what her parents have arranged for her."

"Still, it must be decided by herself," said Gerard, earnestly. "When we are better acquainted—"

"Ah, yes! then you can ask her

what questions you please," said M. de Brye, with a friendly smile. "But, in the meanwhile, do not disturb yourself. Make acquaintance, as you say. Her mother will let you have a little talk together."

Monsieur de Brye thought that there was something prophetic in his chosen son-in-law's anxiety, when, after the young men were gone, he went to his daughter, and found her standing in the garden pulling a rose to pieces with a discontented air.

"Well, my little Fanni," said her father cheerfully; "are you happy, my child? Why are you destroying that poor flower?"

"It was dead," said Fanni, twirling it round in her fingers and throwing it away. "It made me dismal, papa. I don't like dismal things, you see."

She lifted her large eyes slowly, and looked up into his good-natured puzzled face.

"I detest melancholy people," she said; "they kill me. I am not cheerful enough myself to endure them. I love you, papa, because you are always laughing."

"What a character!" said M. de Brye. "One would think I was a sad old goose indeed. But what a droll child you are to talk like this to-day, when you ought to be the happiest girl in the world."

"Ought I?" said Fanni. She looked away and sighed.

"Ta-ta! Of course you ought. A young hero; voyons, seriously—your mother does not like us to talk nonsense—does Monsieur de Maulévrier please you, my child? He is dying to know his fate, poor fellow!"

"His fate!—what fate?" said Fanni, half to herself.

Perhaps M. de Brye thought he was indiscreet in even hinting to his daughter that the decision lay, after all, in her own hands.

"It will be a happy fate, I am sure," he said, prudently retiring. "He is a fine young man, and he has brought good manners from that lonely old place of his. There is something simple and honest about him, too, that pleases me."

Françoise did not contradict her father, but she made a little face which he did not see.

M. de Brye said no more, finding it a dangerous subject. He was rather disturbed, but determined to leave things to settle themselves. Gérard's good looks were certain to make their way, he thought, and if the girl took

it into her head to be fanciful, then would be the time for parental authority to appear on the scene. So he said nothing even to his wife about Fanni's odd manner, and contented himself with praising the young Marquis.

Gérard was a good deal with them during the next few days. He wrote a cheerful letter to his mother, in which he told her that he thought she would be pleased with Mdlle. de Brye; she was a decidedly pretty little person in her own peculiar way; she was distinguished and graceful. He had not talked much to her yet, but he thought she had a certain amount of esprit; certainly she was not dull, though she looked at times a little sad. Her dress was always perfect in itself, though she now and then wore a colour that did not suit her complexion.

It was not a very lover-like letter, but what could one expect under the circumstances? Madame de Maulévrier felt that she could not look for more than this, after reading her son's farewell to that hopeless love of his. Her heart had softened towards him again, there in her loneliness. She felt sure that, once he was safely married to this girl, whom he evidently did not dislike, everything would go well, all anxieties would cease.

It was a fact that Gérard was anything but miserable in those summer days that he spent at Tourlyon, driving about, walking, dining, spending long evenings with the De Brye family, sometimes with one or both of his brothers, sometimes alone. It was such a complete change from his solitary life at Maulévrier. M. de Brye was not

a learned man, certainly, but he was good-natured and amusing. Madame de Brye was gracious and kind. Françoise was a riddle; the little shade of mystery she managed to throw round herself interested Gérard, though she seldom spoke to him, or indeed to any one when he was there. Yet now and then he caught one of those strange glances, in which he began to fancy that there was feeling of some sort. Sometimes he thought it was dislike. Then he told himself that no doubt she, too, felt the awkwardness of their position; two people meeting and parting like strangers, knowing that they were soon to be together for life. Gérard had a shy nature, and he began to feel positively afraid of that quiet girl who moved about the house, seemingly unconscious that his eyes were following her. At

the same time the feeling grew stronger and stronger that he *must* speak to her, that this wall must be broken down, if there was to be any peace for either of them. He wanted to understand her, to know what she thought of him; it was unflattering, besides, to be treated with such indifference. So at last, calling one day on Madame de Brye, he asked suddenly whether he might have an interview with Mademoiselle Françoise.

"I shall be very glad," said Madame de Brye, who was not without her own little anxieties; and after a pause, she added, "Françoise is in the garden. We will go out to her, and you can ask her to walk with you on the terrace."

Then, as she led the way out of the room, she stopped and turned round, fixing her pale eyes upon him. "I

have been wishing that you and Françoise should know more of each other,' she said.

"I hope Mademoiselle de Brye has not—any prejudice against me?" said Gérard.

"Prejudice!" repeated Madame de Brye, raising her eyebrows. "She does not know what such a thing means. She is reserved, like other girls."

On the garden terrace, at the end of the alley of limes, there was a stone summer house, where Mademoiselle de Brye sat at work, attended by her bonne. When Madame de Brye and Gérard appeared, this woman got up and went away.

The wavering shadows of the limes, the faint sweet scent of their flowers, took Gérard's thoughts suddenly home to Maulévrier, and a momentary horror

of his future life came over him. That old home could never be the same again. Everywhere he would meet the doubtful, half-reproachful look of Françoise's eyes, see her small figure moving gently, hear the rustle of her gown, and her low voice with its note of discontent. He had time to think this while he walked with Madame de Brye along the lime-shaded terrace, and then to be angry with himself for the thought. Instead of mourning over himself, ought he not rather to pity this girl, who also must accept the inevitable, to make her fate as easy to her as he could?

Françoise got up and joined him silently. Her mother took up the work she had laid down, and sat there in the summer-house, while the two young people strolled away under the trees. Gérard remarked on the sweetness of

the limes, and asked Françoise if she remembered the avenue at Maulévrier. Yes, she said, very well, and then she reminded him that she had been seldom at Maulévrier; that his brothers used to come to La Maison Blanche when they were boys; "but not you, nor madame your mother. At least, not often. I never knew you."

"It is very true, mademoiselle," said Gérard. "We saw each other sometimes, but little thought then—you know me better now."

"Do I?" said Françoise. It was one of her doubtful looks put into words, nothing more, for she was looking away from him.

They were standing where the sunny garden lay smiling below them, and beyond that the river, and the old houses piled together on the other side, the

gray cathedral towers rising in the midst of them.

The air was hot and clear; not one dark shadow of smoke dimmed the brightness of the sky that arched over Tourlyon. Bells were chiming in the distance, and above the heads of the two young people bees hummed in the limes. Everything seemed full of joy in that light and wealth of summer, and of all living things those two should have been the happiest. Gérard stood with his arms folded, his pale dark face bent towards his companion, his eyes fixed upon her with melancholy concern, while she looked straight away into the distance.

"I am afraid you do not," said Gérard presently. "Yet it would be better, would it not, to understand each other? I certainly do not know you,

and I cannot help fearing sometimes that you dislike me. It makes me very unhappy."

Françoise blushed, and smiled a little. "What have I done to make you think so?" she said.

"Nothing," said Gérard. "But I feel it, and you do not say that I am mistaken."

Françoise was silent; perhaps she felt a little frightened; such plain speaking was hardly to have been expected from her grave and graceful "futur."

"This arrangement that has been made for us," he went on after a minute or two, "is it, perhaps, disagreeable to you, mademoiselle? Trust me, it shall not be carried out against your will, if you will only tell me the truth."

"It is impossible—now—to alter," murmured Françoise.

"Not at all. Nothing that you wish is impossible," said Gérard.

But she had learnt more of the world in her Paris convent than he in his country home, and she knew that a fancy of hers would not easily alter the agreement that their parents had made. Monsieur and Madame de Brye were quite free from any new-fashioned ideas on this subject; they would do what they pleased with their child's life, and no doubt Madame de Maulévrier's views were the same. Gérard looked at things from the romance standpoint, which was very different. The earnestness of his last words struck and pleased her. She ventured to look up at him, and though there was certainly no love in the dark expressive eyes that met hers, their depth of honour and kindness was a treasure in itself. But what a depth of

sadness, too! That vexed Françoise, and made her turn her head away again. He might look more cheerful, she thought, now that he had what he wanted. She knew all about the Maulévrier property, and how it would be improved by his marriage with her. It never occurred to her that his heart's consent as well as hers was wanting. Of course, if he had not wished it, he would never have allowed himself to be proposed to her.

"It is possible, if you wish it," said Gérard, as she did not answer him.

Françoise shook her head gently.

"I do not," she said.

He did not thank her for this assurance; he received it in grave silence. Presently he said,

"If that is the case, we ought certainly to be better friends than we are. I should like you to talk to me openly

if you will. I wish to make you happy, and I should like you to tell me how. I only wish to please you."

A hopeful light dawned in Françoise's eyes. Gérard saw it, and responded to it with the rare sweet smile which sometimes made his face so beautiful.

"I mean it, dear mademoiselle," he said. "Could you have imagined anything else? Ah, yes, I have ideas, and you will help me to carry them out. It shall be the most perfect friendship; we will hide nothing from each other. I have often thought of it, and if I am to find it after all—"

She looked at him with a sort of eager inspiration in her face.

For a moment Gérard thought he was dreaming. Could this be Mademoiselle de Brye!

"Monsieur!" she exclaimed, with a

little sigh of rapture; "then we shall not have to live at Maulévrier?"

Gérard felt as if he had been trying in his dream to gather grapes from thorns, and as if a wound from the thorns had wakened him painfully. He coloured, and answered her with a shade of sternness.

"My home must be with my mother at Maulévrier."

"Ah! Then you did not mean it. You only said it to flatter me!"

"What did I say, mademoiselle?"

"You have forgotten already! You have not much memory," she said, laughing, and turning away from him.

She would hardly speak to him again; though he, poor fellow, anxious to retrieve lost ground, assured her that she could go away from Maulévrier whenever she pleased; he had no wish

to make it a prison to her. Françoise cared for no explanations, and Gérard was too proud and too truthful to contradict himself. So their first interview ended badly. Madame de Brye saw that something had happened, though she was wise enough to make no remarks.

It was getting late in the afternoon as the Marquis de Maulévrier walked back into the town, and turned into the courtyard of La Couronne. He was profoundly sad, and all the bright pictures of the streets were lost upon him. He had thought that, though there was to be no rose in life for him, there might be other flowers, and he had resolved to make himself content with these. But now it seemed as if they were nothing but scentless weeds after all. The old disgust and weariness were again taking possession of him. Once more this

heartless marriage lay on his mind like a weight. Françoise would indeed have been in despair if she had seen the pale stern face, the downcast melancholy eyes of her future husband, as he turned under the old portecochère into the courtyard of the hotel.

The way was partly blocked up by an omnibus and one or two cabs. A train had lately come in, and several sets of travellers were arriving. Servants were bustling about, and there was some confusion and a good deal of loud talking, as the luggage was taken down and carried in.

Two English ladies were standing at the door, waiting for a tall man belonging to them, who was looking after his baggage and paying the cabman. The ladies were both tall; they looked like mother and daughter. Gérard, going

into the house, had to pass close to the younger one; as he did so he took off his hat. She bowed her head slightly in acknowledgment of his politeness, and at that moment they looked straight into each other's face. Both were struck—she, with the sad hopelessness of the handsomest French face she had ever seen; he, with what appeared to him her great beauty, and, more, with the thought and feeling, the frank serene interest in what she was looking at, which he managed to see in that one glance of her blue eyes. He had never seen that look in a woman's face before, and yet he seemed to know it very well. Poor Gérard! He passed on with bent head into the house, hardly knowing what he was doing or what had happened. It was almost like a miracle. A dream had put itself into human form,

and shown itself to him in open day. It might as well have stayed in dreamland, where it could be worshipped peacefully and without distraction.

CHAPTER VI.

FOREIGNERS.

A BALCONY ran round the inner square of the Hôtel de la Couronne, and below it, in the paved court, stood tall old myrtles and orange-trees in light-green tubs. Vines and flowering creepers ran climbing up the supports of the balcony. Into it opened a corridor with large windows, paved with old red hexagonal tiles. The broad shallow-stepped staircase, and the large rooms on the first floor, were paved with the same tiles, and there was no carpet anywhere.

Monsieur Cliquet's grandfather, in the beginning of this century, was the first landlord of the inn. Before the Revolu-

tion, it had been the town house of an old noble family, which was entirely swept away in the troubles of those days. The Cliquet of to-day was an amiable energetic little man; his wife was a sweet-looking gentle-mannered woman. The management of the house was very much left to Zénobie, the head *femme de chambre*, who, without any fuss or distraction, was everywhere at once, and kept all the wheels going with wonderful regularity. French people were very fond of the Couronne, and came there constantly in a seldom-failing stream. Many Tourlyon worthies breakfasted and dined there every day, and smoked their cigars in the court in the evening. With foreigners it was not quite so popular. Tourlyon was a little out of the way of regular tourists, and Zénobie was not fond of the English; she ruled despotically over her own coun-

try-people, but these strangers were less easily managed. They complained sometimes; they asked for troublesome things, and found fault with the bill. Still, there were great differences between them, and to those who knew how to behave, Zénobie was all graciousness. She did her best to send the others to the new staring Hôtel de France, which some upstart had built a few years ago on the boulevards.

Zénobie hated people who could not talk French, and wondered why they did not stay in their own country. As if French people ever wanted to go to England! They were wise, and stayed at home, where one could be understood. These Englishwomen in their men's hats and ulsters, trying to ask all sorts of ridiculous questions—whether the beds were aired, for instance—and objecting to let Adolphe,

the *garçon de chambre*, bring in their coffee and hot water in the morning—bah! they were too laughable. Zénobie and Adolphe had a way of forgetting all these prejudices, and enjoying the disgust of the Englishwomen. But they had very great respect to persons, and if they took a fancy to any one their memory became excellent.

Mr. Mowbray, when he arrived with his wife and daughter that afternoon, conquered them at once. He spoke French very well, with a charming voice and accent. His manner to Zénobie was just as polite as to Madame Cliquet herself. Mrs. Mowbray, though quieter, was equally agreeable in her way, and her daughter was evidently an angel. One look was enough; the whole hotel was at her feet.

Madame Cliquet gave her best rooms to these new guests; they were close to the

top of the stairs. The beds were in alcoves, with red curtains drawn across them; there were mirrors and marble-topped tables, and thick mats on the red floor. From the high windows one looked up and down the picturesque length of the Rue Notre Dame, strange old carved houses, with flowers growing on their roofs and brightening their dark garret windows; little quaint shops down below; here and there the porte-cochère of some large house whose front windows were all shut up. Far away up the street, the Place Notre Dame lay in front of the cathedral; a few yards below the hotel, a broad flight of steps led to the old church of St. Martin. There were plenty of people in the street, walking up and down, standing at the shop-doors, leaning out of the windows. A smart carriage came rattling over the stones; then a

drag drawn by three great white horses, stepping proudly in their shaggy blue collars, and shaking their bells, while their dark-faced driver cracked his whip.

Then the cathedral bells rang out, and St. Martin's answered them in deeper, nearer tones; and the sun shone dazzling on the flowers opposite, and Pauline Mowbray, who was standing at her window all this time, fascinated by the bright picture of the street, remembered that she ought to get ready for dinner. She heard her father and mother talking in the next room. Presently he went downstairs, and Mrs. Mowbray came into her daughter's room. She was one of those women, fresh, cheerful, and healthy, with beautiful hair and complexion, who look as if they could never grow old. Even a long journey has no power over

their appearance; they are never tired, never ruffled. Pauline, in spite of her beauty, was not her mother's equal in all this.

"Yes, I know I am late," she said, "but I could not tear myself away from the window. What a delightful place this is! Mother, did you see that young Frenchman who passed us at the door?"

"That very good-looking young man, you mean?"

"Yes. Poor fellow, his face has been haunting me ever since. Anything so sad—I wonder what can be the matter with him? And wonderfully handsome; but not like a man of the present day, somehow. He might have been on his way to the guillotine."

"What fun it must be to have an imagination like yours, dear child! Your father was talking just now about your

melancholy Marquis. He reminded him of somebody he met once in Paris, many years ago."

"Melancholy Marquis! Do you know who he is, then?"

"Not in the least. That is what your father called him, and I thought it a good description. There is the dinner-bell. Are you ready?"

"Yes," said Pauline. "Did you ever see anything so charming as this hotel?"

"It is an old town house of somebody's," said Mrs. Mowbray.

"Turned out in the Revolution. I shall dream of it," said Pauline.

They found Mr. Mowbray in the dining-room—a long room, with brown panels and a polished floor. On the walls hung a number of old pictures, some of them portraits, others hunting and battle scenes. Zénobie and two waiters were hovering

about, and several Frenchmen had already taken their places.

Mr. Mowbray was young-looking like his wife. He was tall, long-legged and active, with no hair on his face, which was pleasant, thoughtful, and peculiar. His light hair grew long, and curled at the ends. His manner was a little enthusiastic, and he gave one the idea of failing slightly in common sense. Yet he had proved himself wise in a very great matter—he had married a sensible woman. Since his marriage his relations had given up a Philistine thick-headed way they had of calling him "poor George."

There were a good many nice-looking people at the table d'hôte. Among them Pauline saw her Frenchman, but this time he was not alone. Two other young men were with him; they talked a good

deal to each other, though he did not join in much. His eyes wandered now and then across the table towards the English party. He and his companions were evidently great favourites of Zénobie's; she watched them with a smile on her face, and waited on them attentively.

After dinner she came up to Mrs. Mowbray, and asked whether madame would like to walk in the garden? It was pretty enough, and there were roses there. Perhaps madame and mademoiselle were fond of roses? If so, would they please to gather any they liked? They received this offer very amiably; and Zénobie, with her firm stately tread, led the way across the court, past the groups of tables and chairs, through a narrow passage, into the hotel garden. It was somewhat overgrown with shrubs and late

straggling rose-bushes; the grass was long; but there were paths wandering about, and on a little mound in the middle there was a prismatic glass ball set on a post, which glittered wonderfully in the declining sun. There was also a green dishevelled old fountain, with gold-fish in its basin, and some queer foreign fowls behind a wire-fence.

"Brother officers, I suspect, not relations," said Mr. Mowbray, as he strolled with his wife and daughter among these attractions. "It is only the tall fellow who reminds me of M. de Maulévrier, and he does remind me of him tremendously. Those two fierce-looking lads are not the least like him."

"Papa, I thought there was a strong likeness in the youngest—the boyish one," said Pauline.

"As unlike as two men could be," said

her father decidedly. "But I shall find out. Stay here a few minutes while I get a cigar. We must go and look at the town presently."

The two Englishwomen sat down on a little iron bench, and Pauline gathered a rose from a bush close by, and held it idly in her hand, looking at it. She was paler than usual, and some new thought or feeling had disturbed the tranquil peace of her brow and eyes; there was a slight contraction—a cloud upon the blue. She had travelled several hundred miles from Tourlyon. Mrs. Mowbray felt it by instinct.

"That is a pretty rose," she said. "Do you know it?"

"Yes. I forget its name. Aunt Lucia has it," said Pauline, gently. "And it is in the Rectory garden too. How odd it is to be so far away!"

"You have been such a homebird all your life," said her mother, "but you don't enjoy things any the less, I think."

"O no—more; but one understands the meaning of things, and—*you* know," said Pauline, laying her hand on her mother's.

Mrs. Mowbray held it fast for a moment. Neither she nor Pauline was often demonstrative, but their thoughts were both gone the same way, to hilly sheep-walks by an English sea, whose waters rose and fell against gray shelving cliffs. That old house under the hill had its music in the air, the wild song of the sea; and when the wind was blowing, those pines on the crest joined in with their Æolian harp.

Here, in France, a distant band was playing airs from an opera, and then, like a grand protest from more earnest

days, the cathedral chimes broke out suddenly, followed by St. Martin's deep tones, and the more distant voice of other belfries. Pauline looked up smiling at her mother. Just then, round the turn in the path close to where they were sitting, came her father, and with him the melancholy Frenchman.

Mr. Mowbray introduced the Marquis de Maulévrier to his wife and daughter with quite an air of triumph, a sort of "I told you so." Gérard's face had brightened wonderfully. He smiled as he looked from one to the other of his new acquaintances—the charming original Englishman, his wife with her handsome kindly face, his lovely daughter.

"It is the most extraordinary thing, madame," he said to Mrs. Mowbray; "Monsieur Mowbray knew my father in Paris long ago—in fact, he had the

honour of helping him to write a book. But we meet with so few English books in France, monsieur, I really do not know what it was; I should have so much pleasure in reading it."

"You shall have it," said Mr. Mowbray; "but it never had much success. I called it *Studies in the Great French Revolution.* M. de Maulévrier most kindly got admittance for me to some of the oldest and finest libraries in Paris and elsewhere; and he gave me a good many notes of his own—stories, traditions, and so forth. But the book was too Royalist in tone to take much with the public. Your family is still Legitimist, I suppose?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"And yet your brothers are in the army!"

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"France and the Republic are not yet the same thing," he said; "they have not yet made it impossible for us to serve our country. There are only three ways open to old-fashioned people like us—the church, the army, and the navy; or else we do nothing."

"Is that your case?" said Mr. Mowbray.

"Yes," answered Gérard, with something like a sigh. But then he looked up, and quite accidentally met Pauline's eyes looking at him with the same interest as before. Something seemed to tell him that these suddenly found people were his friends; that they liked him, were glad to see him, cared to know his history. And he felt the sort of exaltation that a knight of old may be supposed to have felt under the eyes of his lady, whether she cared for him or not.

"We are generally alone at Maulévrier, my mother and I," he said; "I hunt and shoot, and play the piano, that is all. I do not dislike it, except now and then when I grow restless."

"And then, I suppose, you try what Tourlyon gaieties will do for you," said Mr. Mowbray.

"Tourlyon gaieties—ah, no!" said Gérard. "I came here to see my brother and some people—old neighbours—who are living here. Madame, Monsieur Mowbray is making me talk of nothing but myself. May I hope that you and mademoiselle are amusing yourselves well in France?"

"Very well, thank you," said Mrs. Mowbray. "We are all fond of travelling, and the best part of it is that one makes pleasant acquaintances."

"I have never been abroad before,"

said Pauline, "so it is all delightful to me. Have you ever been in England?"

"Never, mademoiselle. I have often wished to go there, but we French people are such terrible stay-at-homes. Once I went with my mother into Spain. One can do that more easily; there is no sea to cross."

"You don't mean to say you would mind the sea!" exclaimed Mr. Mowbray.

"For myself, no. I was thinking of my mother."

Gérard hardly knew what he was saying: he was struck with wonder and delight at being addressed by Pauline without hesitation, as if it was quite a natural thing for them to talk together. He had read of English girls in books, but they had not prepared him for this reality; books never do.

Victor had gone out with Léon immediately after dinner, and the Marquis thought he might devote himself for that evening to his new friends. He only just remembered his father, who had died when he was a child; but there was an attraction for him in any one who had known his father; thus Mr. Mowbray's beautiful daughter was not his only claim to Gérard's regard. They all walked together up the street.

The Place Notre Dame was half surrounded with gray old palaces, the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais de Justice; but on the right there was a row of tall houses, where poor people lived. These were partly wooden, partly clothed in overlapping slates. Their roofs went up in curious peaks; the black beams of each nodding gable were all warped and crooked with age; but every window

was gay with flowers, and bright-faced women in snowy caps clattered in and out of the low dark shops below. Across the eastern side of the square lay the west front of the cathedral. The sun was sinking behind the turrets of the Hôtel de Ville opposite; the square was in shadow; but a glory of evening light glowed on the rough granite face of the cathedral. The great doorways lay in the shade that was quickly advancing upwards; but the upper half of the two towers, with the rich carving of their façades, the immense rose-window, the rows and groups of statues that stood solemnly in their places, battered and worn with the storms and wars of six or seven hundred years, yet in their old age more grand and beautiful than ever, were still in the full golden sunshine of that June evening.

Pauline never forgot her first visit to Tourlyon Cathedral. She and her father and mother and Gérard de Maulévrier walked together across the square, where white and gray doves were flying round the towers above their heads in the quiet air. They passed the little stall of "objets de piété," and went into the great doorway, where in the sudden twilight the poor blind man was sitting, rattling sous in a tin mug. Then into the vastness, silence, and almost darkness of the cathedral.

Pauline had learnt a great deal from her father about styles of architecture; but she had also learnt from him to look first on the spiritual side of things, to ignore guide-books and measurements, and to trust always to her own impressions. To be sure, he was himself better than most guide-books; for,

having spent many years of his younger life abroad, and knowing history perfectly well, he always knew what to look for and find in every town. There was a faint smell of incense hovering among those heavy pillars. Through the west window a flood of coloured light poured in across the church, and, flowing as far as the eastern bays of the choir, lingered on the high altar, the decorations of which glittered likes plates of gold. A few women, a priest, a workman or two, were kneeling here and there, especially before the altars in the many side-chapels, with their pictures, and stands of candles, and pots of artificial flowers. The whole thing made a strange impression on an English girl, used to the trim cathedrals of her native country. In this great stately old nave everything seemed so rough and

homely; it belonged to the people, this church. There was a wild picturesqueness, a naturalness about it all; even its flimsy decorations seemed as if they had been put there by faithful souls who knew no better.

The choir-gates were locked, and it was too late to see the tombs and treasures of the cathedral. They walked round the side-aisles of the nave, saying little. The Frenchman especially was silent, showing none of the irreverence that Pauline had been told by some people to expect from his nation. When they came out again into the Place Notre Dame, the shadows had climbed and climbed, till now there was only one touch of gilding sunlight on the top of the southern tower.

"What do you think of it, Pauline?" said her father.

"I don't know, papa; it is like life," said Pauline.

"Yes, mademoiselle," said the Marquis, earnestly. "There you see the life of our people. These statesmen of ours, who would take it all away, they are simply killing France, do you see? and it is suicide to kill one's country."

"Ah! Do you speak so strongly as that?" said Mr. Mowbray. "Come along, then; let us talk politics, because I don't altogether agree with you."

"As you please, monsieur; but I hate politics, and know nothing about them," said Gérard. "I can only tell you my convictions."

"And they are that all the old ways are the best."

"Not at all," said Gérard, with emphasis.

Mrs. Mowbray and her daughter did

not yawn, like M. de Brye's dog, as they listened to the views of this young Royalist; for they, like many other people who get all their knowledge of France from a Paris correspondent or some disinterested person who has travelled about among the large towns, gathering information from lawyers, doctors, manufacturers, and so forth, did not know much of that large silent class which M. de Maulévrier represented. A class which has only to get free of its own and other people's prejudices to be a fit leader for any civilised nation. But true civilisation is still far away, and the reign of the educated is farther still, and seems to retire, instead of advancing, so that the best among the French are likely to get less and less of their fair share in ruling their country.

CHAPTER VII.

PAULINE'S NEW FRIEND.

PAULINE did not sleep well that night; her dreams were troubled, and she woke early in the morning to listen to the striking hours as they went by, and to the noises in the waking street—heavy wheels rumbling, whips cracking, sabots clattering. She lay awake thinking of the day before, of her father's strange meeting with M. de Maulévrier. She asked herself what made this new acquaintance so different from an Englishman, and, in fact, from every one she had ever met. She thought of him as she had looked at him—frankly, simply, and intently, with-

out any attempt to deceive herself about the interest she felt in him. She was very happy, for she was only a girl, after all. The sweetest little smile was curling her lips as she wondered whether they would see much of him to-day.

She went out before breakfast with her father. They wandered through the old blackened streets, full of life and colour, where people paused in their work, and smiled their admiration of the "belle Anglaise" as she went by. Here and there a low stone arch carried the street over a quiet little dark stream, which stole along between the backs of tall old houses, their walls stained with every shade of green and brown dampness. The lower half of such a picture would have been dismal enough if the windows had not had flowers in them, with long green tendrils running down to the

water; while the broad bright sunshine flowed down between the nodding roofs, lighting up the dormer windows, with their square black coifs, and the long poles that stuck out of them, where blue blouses and shirts were hanging out to dry.

Further on, Mr. Mowbray and Pauline came out of these narrow streets upon a quiet little quay by the Yonne, not many yards above one of the large bridges, but quite out of the way of traffic. The gardens of private houses ran down to the river here; there were willows hanging over corners of gray wall, and lightly dipping themselves into the clear green water. A great washing was going on. Each garden had its door opening on a little patch of stones by the river's brink, and at almost every one an old woman or a girl was busy beating and

rinsing her clothes. By the quay there was a long wooden shed full of women; they knelt in boxes on the green slippery planks, and washed and talked, and made the place ring with laughter.

Mr. Mowbray began to talk to an old woman who was standing by, and several merry-faced girls stopped their work to listen, with eyes fixed on him and Pauline. There was nothing rude or unpleasant in their stare. Pauline was attracted by their sweet bright faces, and went close up to the shed to talk to them; but then they were seized with shyness. They laughed, and set to work again, making great splashes in the water. The air seemed full of sunshine; the laughing voices rippled with the river.

Then the finishing touch was given to the interest of that morning by the sudden appearance of Monsieur de

Maulévrier. His brother Victor was with him. Gérard introduced him to his English acquaintances. Both young men shook hands with Mr. Mowbray, and made low bows to Pauline. The blanchissenses were forgotten, and they all walked together to the bridge, which brought them to the lower end of the Rue Notre Dame.

Pauline thought that, after all, the difference between French and English gentlemen was not so very great. She walked on in front with Gérard, up the long winding street, while her father followed with Victor. Her companion began asking for her mother, and hoping that she was not too fatigued. Then he explained that he and his brother were engaged to breakfast with some friends, but that he could not let the morning pass without seeing those other

friends that he had made so unexpectedly.

Gérard was not a man of much conversation. He could talk to Monsieur and Madame de Brye, when it was his duty and did not interest him; he had also been able to talk last night, when Mr. Mowbray drew him out on politics. He could talk for hours with people who knew and understood him—such as his old tutor, M. Olivier; but with a young Englishwoman, whom he admired hopelessly and beyond expression, the finding of words was a serious difficulty. Pauline hardly realised the impression she had made on this tall Frenchman with his melancholy eyes. There certainly was a charm about him; she felt sorry for him, and supposed he was not used to talking to girls. So she talked to him, looking up with the sweet un-

consciousness which other people, before Gérard de Maulévrier, had found irresistible. She told him how they had been walking through the old streets, and making friends with the washerwomen.

"How cheerful they all look!" she said. "Our poor people at home are not really discontented, I think, but they look so grave about everything. Most of yours seem light-hearted. The women especially have such good faces."

"Still, French people are sadder than they used to be," said Gérard. "But you are right—they are very good, our peasants. They bear their misfortunes well, and struggle on to better times. You do not know many of the French, mademoiselle?"

"No, very few," said Pauline, smiling. "I ought not to have any opinion about them yet."

"All that you have said is perfectly right," answered Gérard. "But I was thinking you cannot judge two nations from the same point de vue. Monsieur Mowbray, your father, knows us very well. Why has he never brought you to France before?"

"He thought I should understand it all better if I did not see it till I was grown up," said Pauline. "That was one reason. Then we are not at all rich—there are a good many of us—" she stopped, colouring a little; and then, seeing that he was looking and listening with the deepest interest, she thought she had better go on. "I have five brothers and sisters. All that makes it not easy to get away."

"Ah! and your brothers are very happy?" said Gérard, half in the tone of a question.

"They are like other boys, dear troublesome fellows," said Pauline. "It is hard work to amuse them on a wet day."

"Do you amuse them? They are very fortunate—it ought not to be hard work. I picture to myself an English home as something so cheerful and contented," said Gérard. "Every one with his own taste; books and music all over the house; dogs, horses, children. Are you really so happy, mademoiselle?"

"I think we are very happy, though we don't always know it," answered Pauline. "At least—" she stopped herself again, and looked a little grave.

"At least—" he repeated, in a low voice.

"O, nothing! Are you fond of the sea?"

"I love it very much."

"Then you would like my home. It is five minutes' walk from the sea, in a hollow of the downs, with fir-trees up above, and such lovely flowers. Things grow there as well as in Devonshire. Myrtles and camellias stay out of doors all the winter."

"Have you any neighbours?"

"O, yes; we are close to a town. We look down over it. So of course there are plenty of people. And what is your home like?"

"My home! It is in a desert. You cannot imagine anything more lonely. An old tumbledown house, standing in the midst of forests, where we hunt the wolf and the wild boar. The nearest town is three leagues off, and we have no neighbours but the peasants. Except the curé; but you would hardly call him society, though he is a most enlightened man."

"You and your mother live there alone?"

"Generally. My brothers are not often there."

"Madame de Maulévrier must be very dull sometimes. Is there no one with her now?"

"No; she is alone. But she finds a great deal to do. She is very practical, and I have never heard her complain."

Just then an idea rushed into his mind and took possession of it. Could anything be a more strange and poetical contrast—a more interesting adventure—than to bring this English girl to visit his mother at Maulévrier?

"Ah, mademoiselle," he said, "could you understand that such a place as Maulévrier is not always sad and desolate? When the trees are all in leaf, and the birds singing, and the clouds chasing each

other across that waving plain of forest—yes, there are days when you would feel a solemn cheerfulness, a satisfaction in being alive; for, after all, there is as much life in the country as in the town. Or have you a great dread of being far from crowds?"

Something in Pauline answered instantly to his enthusiastic tone. She looked up at him with smiling eyes.

"I believe your home is very beautiful!" she said. "I don't think I ever saw anything like it."

"If you would only come and see it, then! Do not say no at once! I should have much to show you—and Monsieur and Madame Mowbray. I could give him materials for another book; we have old stories enough in our family. Would you be very much ennuyée, mademoiselle, with a few days at Maulévrier?"

"I am sure I should enjoy it very much indeed," said Pauline, and perhaps she looked even more. "But I don't know—you must settle it with papa."

"Of course I shall arrange it all. A thousand thanks, mademoiselle. You are too good. You make me the happiest man in the world."

He certainly looked happy enough, as they stopped at the hotel entrance to wait for the others, who were a few yards behind. He was smiling; there was colour in his face, and a sort of glow in his eyes, as he stood and looked at her. It seemed as if, in this girl's presence, all his troubles were forgotten, his melancholy had vanished; he could realise nothing but her. Victor, as he walked up with Mr. Mowbray, stared at his brother, smiled a little, and shrugged his shoulders. None of the others noticed this. Something was said

about meeting in the public gardens in the afternoon, where the band of Léon's regiment was to play. Then Pauline and her father turned into the hotel, and the young men put their hats on and walked up the street together.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMPLICATIONS.

VICTOR DE MAULÉVRIER listened quietly to his brother's praises of the English people. He allowed that Mr. Mowbray was intelligent and that his daughter was pretty. But he was unlike most of his countrymen in having no fancy for the English, and he only thought these good specimens of a disagreeable nation.

"You think her *pretty!*" said Gérard, rather indignantly. "She is beautiful!"

"Ah, pardon! that is a great word," said Victor. "A bright complexion—she has lived on bread-and-milk—and a pair of fine blue eyes. Her history is written

on her face. An amiable, contented young woman—nothing more."

"Can any one be so blind!" exclaimed Gérard. "That is all you can see in Mademoiselle Mowbray's face! And indeed, if there was nothing more, what you describe scarcely deserves contempt."

"Contempt! my dear brother, you quite misunderstand me," said Victor, perceiving that Gérard was inclined to be angry. "That ingenuous freshness has no doubt a beauty of its own. I only say that it does not attract me."

"Ah, I remember—you do not believe in good women."

"But certainly, when did I say that?"

Gérard was silent. Presently Victor laughed good-humouredly, and went on,

"I am ready to admire your English ladies, mon cher, as much as you please; and as to the father, he is an amusing

man, and speaks French well. Do you mean to introduce them to Madame de Brye?"

"Most likely, this afternoon," said Gérard. "And there is another thing I mean to do—to ask them to Maulévrier."

"Indeed!" said Victor, with a little movement of surprised resignation. "What will our mother say to that? But you know best."

"She is always glad to see any one who knew our father. And I wish to show them that country, it will be new to them; they have nothing like it in England."

"England is too small to hold Maulévrier," said Victor. "But do you think this plan is the very wisest you could have made? Considering everything—you must forgive me, but I am the most prudent man in France—it seems to me

that just now you have a good deal on your hands. There might be complications; I would reflect, if I were you."

"I don't know what you mean by complications," said Gérard; "but all that is too late now. I suggested it to Mademoiselle Mowbray just now, as we walked up the street."

"Is it possible!" said Victor; "then I have nothing more to say. When will it be? You will write to my mother, of course."

"I don't know; next week. She will send the calèche, and I shall go with them; you too, I suppose?"

"There will not be room for me," said Victor. "Let me see, I shall go on before, and prepare madame for her visitors. Cliquet will let me have a dog-cart, or else I shall go by train."

"You must not prejudice her against them."

"Not I: I shall tell her exactly what you say about them. Viola! The strongest Anglophile could not do more than that."

Gérard felt nothing but pleasure at his brother's change of tone. He and Victor had always been good friends, though as different as two young men could be. And now, when his brothers had just given up their rights to him so readily, he felt as if he owed them all something more than ordinary regard.

They arrived in excellent spirits at the house on the boulevard. Mademoiselle de Brye had been dreading this visit, haunted by the talk and the parting of yesterday. She thought Gérard was angry with her, and, with all her indifferences to him, the idea was disagreeable. But to her surprise he came in looking happier than she had ever seen him, and in his greeting of herself she saw no sign of his

remembering their little quarrel of the day before. This again displeased Françoise, and chilled any small feeling of repentance she might have had. She thought this man was too provoking, one day expecting such great things from her, such absurd exaltations, and looking miserable all the time; the next, showing no particular interest in her, but full of a new life and brightness that she could not understand. What was to be made of such a fiancé as this?

Françoise listened with lowered eyelashes as he talked to her father and mother in the salon after breakfast, and told them of his new English acquaintances. M. de Brye was deeply interested. Madame de Brye looked a little stiff; she knew no English, and in her mind felt scornful of them. But she listened attentively to all Gérard had to say.

Victor, who had been standing in the window, moved gradually round behind a sofa, till he found himself near Françoise. She was quite aware of this manœuvre, and welcomed him with a slight conscious smile. Victor's manner was friendly and admiring; there was also a shade of sentiment in it, or rather of interest, such as a young man might naturally feel towards his future sister-in-law. Françoise's odd little face softened as he talked to her. It was rather adventurous of him to arrange a private conversation in this way; however, she was anything but annoyed. Victor talked about meeting in the gardens that afternoon, about Léon's regiment, and then about his own. Then he suddenly went back to old days at the Maison Blanche, asking her if she remembered this and that adventure among squirrels, and chestnuts, and wild flowers.

"I am glad you are coming there this summer," he said. "It will be like old times again."

"Shall you be there?" asked Françoise. "I do not know about old days. I think I shall die of dismalness. It is true, I never think of those woods without shivering. When one was a child, it was amusing enough. But will not you be gone back to your regiment?"

"Not at first, I hope," said Victor. "I must pay a long visit to Maulévrier. To begin with, there will be Gérard's English friends to entertain."

"Are they going there? I should like to see them. I have sometimes seen English in Paris, and they always look so odd; they have the air—how shall I say it?—of wearing clothes made for somebody else."

Madame de Brye had now found out

that her daughter and Victor de Maulévrier were chattering together in a corner. So she left the Comte and Gérard to their talk about England, and advanced towards these two. She also liked Victor, who was more comprehensible than his brother to the usual run of minds.

"Well, Monsieur Victor," said she graciously, "are you too in love with these English ladies?"

"An impossible state of things, madame, as long as I live among French ladies," answered Victor.

"Ah, I am glad you are so patriotic. Your brother seems quite carried away. And Monsieur Léon—has he lost his heart too?"

"He has not had the honour of being introduced to them. But I think I can answer for Léon's faithfulness," said Victor.

"You must forgive Gérard, madame.

He is something of a poet; and those sort of people have their fancies."

"I have no fault to find with him," said Madame de Brye, smiling a little contemptuously. "Seriously, though, what are these people? Are they noble? Ought one to take any notice of them?"

"Not noble, I think," said Victor. "But très-bien. They might very well be somebody in their own country. Their name is Mowbray."

"Ah, Mowbray! That is not so impossible as many English names," said Madame de Brye.

Victor considered himself a great philosopher of the Cynic school, if his position was to be defined strictly. Feeling himself superior to his fellow-mortals, he liked to watch and dissect their motives. The weaknesses of other people were a source of quiet amusement to

him. Having always expected, and been prepared for, the arrangement which was to shelve him as a younger brother for life, he took it as a necessary part of life, a disagreeable necessity. Perhaps this shutting up of the gates of ambition was more painful to him than to either of his cheerful young brothers, Léon and Jules, because he had a good deal of worldly cleverness; but no one was likely to find out that Victor ever felt himself wronged.

This afternoon he was amused by Madame de Brye's curiosity about the English ladies. She was dying to see them, that was quite plain, and to know all about them, though she did not choose to ask many questions. Gérard's new enthusiasm interested her much more than it did her daughter, who was painfully indifferent. So Victor thought at first;

but, after all, he was not sure. Françoise looked across at Gérard, and he thought that in the glance there was both anger and wounded pride. This was a little beyond Victor's understanding, for he knew nothing of the interview yesterday. Did Fanni like Gérard so much that she was already jealous, and could not bear to hear him praise other women? She was certainly a strange little creature.

Early in the afternoon they all got into a large carriage and drove to the public garden at the other end of the town. There they got out, and, leaving the carriage near the gates, walked slowly through the broad smooth avenues. Two or three fountains were playing; the high jets of water waved against the deep-blue sky like long plumes of the finest silver feathers, and then flew off like

showers of diamonds in the soft wind that was blowing. All about the fountains there were brilliant beds of flowers and tall groups of leafy plants—aloes with their rare white flowers, delicate grasses that rustled and trembled in the air. From this centre branched off high double avenues of elms, with a floor of even gravel, and many seats in the shade. Near the fountains, on a square of shady grass, stood the gaily-painted pavilion where the band played. The garden sloped down southwards to the river and an ornamental bridge, over which crowds of people came flowing all the afternoon; there was room for them all. Several smart carriages, like Madame de Brye's, were drawn up near the gates; ladies in Paris dresses, a good many officers in uniform, and little boys and girls in embroidered garments, were strolling about

talking to their friends. The good bourgeoisie of Tourlyon was also largely represented; and all among the smartest gowns and bonnets moved dark-eyed peasant-women in their clean frilled caps —nothing so becoming could have been bought in Paris—with their merry elves of children, and their husbands in black caps and clean blouses.

Monsieur de Brye had to talk to one acquaintance after another. His wife and daughter wandered about in the shade with the two young men, while the band played a spirited battle-march, almost a dancing measure. Madame de Brye, tall and thin, was all wrapped in black silk and lace; she looked distinguished, and waved her large black fan slowly. Françoise was entirely dressed in blue. The colour was not very becoming to her, and made her look paler than usual; but

she was not just then particularly discontented. Gérard, perhaps rather conscience-stricken, had taken possession of her that afternoon as he had never done before. He would walk beside her and talk to her; and though she might have found Victor's conversation more amusing, it was impossible not to feel pleased at such attention from Gérard. To-day, too, he was more like other men; he did not sentimentalise, but talked about ordinary things, and laughed pleasantly at his companion's sharp little remarks. Françoise began to think that any one so handsome and well-mannered could not make himself very disagreeable; the fog that veiled her future life began to lift a little. M. de Maulévrier might, of course, be less absent-minded; but that was his natural oddity, which could not be helped. If he would only be cheer-

ful and good-humoured, and not expect impossibilities from his wife, such as being content at Maulévrier, they might, after all, get on tolerably well.

They had been standing in a group under the elm-trees, near the middle fountain, but just out of reach of its spray, with a damp sweet air blowing from it in their faces. Monsieur de Brye was still in request among his friends. Léon had come up to them; he was better looking than Victor, and made a very handsome little officer. Seeing that Gérard and Françoise were busy talking to each other, he followed Victor's example in devoting himself to Madame de Brye, who presently sat down on a bench close by, and was well amused with a talkative young man on each side of her. She was not quite at ease in letting Françoise stand apart with Gérard, though they

were only a yard or two away; but none of her acquaintances were in sight at the moment, and she thought it so very desirable that those two should become friends that she determined to indulge them for once. So they stood there quite à l'Anglaise for a few minutes. What they were talking about it would be difficult to say. Paris, the fashion, the theatres—these were favourite subjects with Françoise, though she knew little enough of them. Gérard knew more in one sense, and less in another. He hated Paris in theory, and thought it the centre of all tyranny and disorder. But he was not prejudiced enough to care to oppose Françoise in her little ravings. He stood with a rather dreamy smile on his face, listening and answering, sometimes looking away with a long searching gaze round the gardens. Françoise

wondered once or twice what he was looking for; and then suddenly caught sight of some people on the other side of the great fountain.

"Ah, there they are, your English friends," she said.

Gérard saw them too. He hesitated a moment.

"May I go to them? Madame de Brye was good enough to say that I might introduce them—"

"O yes, go. I beg you will," said Françoise, walking back to her mother.

Gérard had no time to think of her as he hurried round the fountain. There was the object of his enthusiasm, with her agreeable parents, coming smiling to meet him. Miss Mowbray's eyes looked bluer than ever that afternoon; she too might, perhaps, feel that this was a happy occasion. After a few minutes, Gérard

remembered to tell Mrs. Mowbray that some friends of his were most anxious to make her acquaintance.

"They have a house here," he explained; "but they are old friends and neighbours of my family. We are very intimate with them. We shall find them under the trees yonder."

Madame de Brye, however, was polite enough to meet them half-way. As soon as she saw the party, pointed out to her by Françoise, coming in her direction, she got up and went towards them, followed by her daughter, the two young Maulévriers, and Monsieur de Brye, who had just rejoined his family. So French and English met in the very middle of the garden, observed by Tourlyon eyes, to which, well-dressed as they were, the foreigners appeared as something outlandish.

Pauline has often thought since of that meeting under the blue sky in the gardens, the band playing a wild waltz that filled all the air, Gérard de Maulévrier, with his courteous eager manner, presenting her and her people to the Comte and Comtesse de Brye, Mademoiselle de Brye, his brother, the Vicomte de Maulévrier. The gentlemen's low formal bows, the deep inclinations of the ladies, her father smiling with his hat off, and taking the limp fingers that Monsieur de Brye offered him. Pauline at once decided that she liked M. de Brye the best of the family. The ladies looked stiff; the girl in blue, with her faded complexion and peculiar eyes, gazed with a curious scrutiny which did not quite fit in with Pauline's ideas of French politeness.

But this was only at the first moment. They were all very pleasant afterwards.

The four ladies sat down under the trees, with the three young men in attendance. M. de Brye took Mr. Mowbray away to show him some of the rare plants and shrubs in the garden. Pauline thought how odd it would be in England to find herself sitting quite silent beside her mother, like the French girl at the other end of the bench. Madame de Brye gave her whole attention to Mrs. Mowbray, and asked her all sorts of funny little questions about life in England, showing the greatest surprise at her answers. Gérard and his brothers seemed to think that it was their duty to listen. Françoise also listened, nodding and lifting her eyebrows now and then. She evidently thought life in England a very grotesque affair.

Things grew more lively when M. de Brye and Mr. Mowbray came back. The

Comte was full of jokes and compliments; and some spirited talk went on between the four elders, the younger people still listening meekly. Pauline grew a little tired of the silent neighbourhood of Léon, who stood quite near her, but did not attempt to speak, or even to look at her. He was either afraid or indifferent. He seemed absorbed in listening to M. de Brye's amusing speeches. Sometimes he laughed to himself, suddenly showing white teeth under his dark moustache, and looked at his brothers; but Miss Mowbray might not have been there at all for any notice he took of her. She thought the manners of young Frenchmen—except, of course, M. le Marquis—might easily be improved. On the whole, she was not very sorry when they all got up, Léon made his bow and vanished, and the De

Brye party, with Gérard and Victor, walked away to their carriage, Gérard first saying to Mr. Mowbray, "I shall see you this evening," and taking leave of his English friends with a smile that made up for other people's deficiencies.

In the next few days they saw a good deal of Monsieur and Madame de Brye, who, finding that they gave great pleasure to Gérard by attention to his father's old acquaintance, and seeing that the Mowbrays themselves were quite comme-il-faut, gave up their usual exclusiveness, and were very civil to them. As a general rule, foreign travellers might as easily have been received on intimate terms in a convent of cloistered nuns as in a house like M. de Brye's. Mr. Mowbray thought it all great fun: he liked foreigners and their ways. His wife was not quite so much enchanted. She

neither cared for Madame de Brye nor her daughter, and she did not assent very heartily to her husband's remark that it was a capital thing for Pauline to see something of good French society.

"It can't do Pauline much good to be with a girl like Mademoiselle de Brye," she said. "They have not two ideas alike, or a word to say to each other. They have been brought up so differently, for which one is thankful."

"If they never speak to each other there is no great harm done," said Mr. Mowbray. "But that is a new feature in Polly. I thought she could always talk to everybody."

"And there are all those young men about the house every day," his wife went on. "However—see what it is to live in a free country—I don't believe they even dare to tell themselves that

Pauline is pretty—a fortunate thing too, for what would Aunt Lucia say?"

"Except the Marquis: he admires her uncommonly," said Mr. Mowbray. "As a beautiful picture, you know. Don't alarm yourself in the least: nothing else is possible. His mother will find the right wife for him. He is far too good a fellow to strike out for himself."

"Dear me, how miserable! Not that I wish it, of course, though he is charming. You don't really mean, George, that we are going to Maulévrier."

"After Madame de Maulévrier's civil letter I don't see how we can refuse. Don't set yourself against it. Polly and I are the majority: we shall carry it. She wants to go as much as I do. That will be a glimpse of French life, if you like. This is nothing to it."

"I hope no harm will come of it. I have a little presentiment," said Mrs. Mowbray.

"Nonsense! You *are* afraid of the Marquis. I tell you, you may trust a Frenchman to make a prudent arrangement. I wish he was capable of something rash. I should like him still better than I do."

"I hope you are right. At any rate, I trust Pauline. She takes a great interest in him, though, George."

"Why, you'll drive me mad. What in the world has brought you into this nervous state?"

"I am not nervous; but one can't help thinking—"

"Don't think. Enjoy yourself. I would never have come to France if I had known you were going to think. I tell you, as to Gérard de Maulévrier,

the thing is impossible—unnatural—it couldn't happen if it tried. Are you satisfied now?"

"O, certainly," answered Mrs. Mowbray; and she said no more.

From all this, which was said when they had been a few days at Tourlyon, it is plain that they had not discovered Gérard's engagement to Françoise de Brye—a curious comment on arrangements of the kind.

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG THE ORANGE-TREES.

PAULINE and her mother were used to Mr. Mowbray's enthusiasms. He was always discovering hidden geniuses —people who bore out some theory of his, and had never been understood before. He was a happy man, who did not know what it was to be bored. Life to him was a chain of interests, to which new links were added constantly. When he wrote that book of Revolution sketches, France was everything, and the Marquis de Maulévrier had been more than a pleasant helpful acquaintance; he had been to Mr. Mowbray a typical Frenchman of the grand old régime.

Gérard, like and yet unlike his father, interested the Englishman very much in the same way, and was, in his turn, strongly attracted by him. Together they poked about among the old china, glass, and armour of the Tourlyon Musée, studied the manuscripts in the library, traced year by year the history of the cathedral in its timeworn stones. There were strange stories connected with some of the old houses in the town, and the Couronne especially had its traditions, preserved in the Cliquet family, which had always been bien-pensante, though it had grown up in the ruined nest of nobles. The pictures in the dining-room had hung there for more than a hundred years. The hunting and battle scenes had been painted for old counts and barons, while they themselves, in red coats and

powder, with faded faces and solemn eyes, still sat looking out for their frames with the grand air that had belonged to them in life. There were ladies in court dresses, too, with fans in their hands, smiling out of a cloud of curls and feathers. One of these was quite different from the others. She was dressed in a green riding-coat, what people used to call a "joseph," and carried her large beaver hat and whip in her hand. Her face was not French; there was a certain squareness about it, an almost German breadth of forehead, large blue eyes, and a grave sweet smile; altogether she was without the coquettish air of her companions. The picture was better painted than most of them; there was a charming naturalness about it. Monsieur Cliquet had hung it in the best light there was, in

the place of honour at the end of the room.

There came a Sunday which was to be the Mowbray's last day at Tourlyon. They went to high mass at the cathedral, and there saw Gérard de Maulévrier with his friends the Bryes. Afterwards he joined them, and walked back with them to breakfast at the hotel. He and Pauline had seen a good deal of each other through that week, but in a quite formal way. There had been no more friendly talks and confidences. It was Mr. Mowbray's society that Gérard seemed to like best. It crossed Pauline's mind once or twice that Gérard, like his brother, was half inclined to avoid her; he addressed her so very rarely after that first day, and in such a stiffly polite manner. She thought about this more than she would have cared to

confess, remembering the looks and words with which he had asked her to come to Maulévrier. But at any rate, he had not repented of that invitation; he had pressed it earnestly on Mr. and Mrs. Mowbray, and had written to his mother, who had seconded him by a wonderfully polite letter to Mrs. Mowbray. The idea of this visit charmed Pauline more than any one knew. She woke every morning with the feeling that something was before her, something mysterious, interesting, unusual, a new experience of life, to which all the sights in Europe would be nothing. Days spent in an old French château, away in the woods—what would they be? how would the hours pass? Days with Gérard de Maulévrier for host —surely he and she would have more talk then! She longed to know more about

him—how he lived at home, what it was that gave him that trick of melancholy.

After breakfast that Sunday, the other people having gone out, they were looking at the pictures. Monsieur Cliquet had come in, delighted to give them any information they wanted. They were standing before the blue-eyed lady in the joseph.

"If you ever change your mind about selling that picture, you will let me know?" M. de Maulévrier said to the landlord.

"Certainly, Monsieur le Marquis. I am desolated to refuse you. Circumstances *might*—but I consider that picture the gem of my collection."

"You are right there," said Mr. Mowbray. "Who was she?"

"She was the last Comtesse du Loir,' said Gérard. "They murdered her—

she was guillotined. I believe she was descended from English people—her grandmother was English. Her mother was a Maulévrier, one of our family. That connects us with the Comtes du Loir, do you see, and I consider all these family pictures, especially that one. But Monsieur Cliquet does not admit my claim."

"Bien! there is a great deal in it," the friendly Cliquet acknowledged, with a smiling bow. "But it was only the day before yesterday that Monsieur le Marquis suggested it, and I have hardly had time to think. It would be a sad thing for my wife and me, messieurs et mesdames, to have our pretty salle-à-manger suddenly unfurnished."

"But, my dear Monsieur Cliquet," exclaimed Gérard, "I am neither rich nor inconsiderate enough to ask for all your

pictures. It is only that one which I think beautiful."

"I understand, monsieur. And is it not a strange thing how that portrait resembles mademoiselle!"

Little Cliquet bowed to Pauline, and waved his hand towards the Comtesse du Loir. His eyes were twinkling, but nobody looked at him, so that did not matter. Gérard coloured slightly.

"Yes," he said, and turned to examine a hunting piece that hung close by.

"It is the same type of face," said Mr. Mowbray. "The English extraction, I suppose."

Mrs. Mowbray, who was looking at the Marquis, saw his change of colour, and the almost awkward manner in which he turned away. She thought him an odd young fellow, and hoped Pauline had noticed nothing. She also wished,

for the twentieth time, that they were not going to Maulévrier, and debated in her own mind whether it would be well to give Pauline a word of warning. But no, she decided; it was better not to put things into a girl's head, especially a frank simple girl like Pauline. It would spoil her pleasure and do no good.

That evening they dined at Madame de Brye's. Gérard and Léon de Maulévrier were there; Victor had gone home as he proposed. Gérard took Pauline in to dinner, but their friendship did not proceed any further, for he was grave and abstracted, and when he did talk, joined in the general conversation. A week ago Pauline would have made him talk to her, but something in his manner perplexed her now, and gave her a little feeling of constraint. She was also oppressed by Mademoiselle de Brye, in

whose eyes there was a sort of unfriendly, questioning criticism. Some girls in her own country had been known to dislike Pauline; but she never troubled herself about them. These circumstances seemed in one way to be quite different. Why should this French girl look at her so? A certain consciousness tormented Pauline. She wanted to like all the French, to make them like her, and in Mademoiselle de Brye's eyes there was something impenetrable, a suspicion, a watchfulness, that could never be quieted.

Meanwhile M. de Brye was laughing and joking and entertaining Mrs. Mowbray; Madame de Brye was listening politely to Mr. Mowbray, and answering him with shrugs and smiles; Léon was staring about him, and joining in with a quiet laugh now and then. Pauline,

under the shadow of her neighbour's abstraction, thought it all rather tiresome and was glad when they got up; Gérard gave her his arm again, and they crossed the hall to the salon, where the talk went on in a more scattered way.

The coffee table was carried in. Gérard brought Pauline her cup; she looked up as she took it, and smiled at him. "What are you so dismal about?" her sweet eyes seemed to say. He smiled too, but very sadly. "Ah, if I could tell you!" his answering look may have meant. It was hardly satisfactory; things were not exactly brightened by this stolen exchange of glances; yet Pauline felt herself suddenly so much happier, that she was obliged to look down into her coffee. Gérard stood there a moment longer without speaking, and then walked across the room.

After the gentlemen had gone to smoke, the ladies strolled out into the garden. Pauline presently found herself sitting among the orange-trees with Mademoiselle de Brye, who seemed to have purposely lingered behind the others, that they might have a little talk by themselves. She was surprised, for Françoise had always rather avoided her. But sitting in that scented corner of the garden, under a golden sky, with long late sun-rays falling in among the trees and flowers, the cheerful music of the patrol sounding up and down the distant streets, and the thought in her mind that this time to-morrow she would be at Maulévrier, Pauline did not care much what happened to her now. If her thoughts about Mademoiselle de Brye had taken any shape, it would have been indifference. What could

matter less to her than this girl and her doings?

"So you are going to Maulévrier, to-morrow, mademoiselle," said Françoise, fixing her eyes on the fair English face. "Are you glad? Are you looking forward to it very much?"

"Yes, very much," said Pauline. "You know it well, don't you? Is it not a beautiful old place?"

"M. de Maulévrier thinks it so, I believe. You will judge for yourself. As for me, I always found it as sad, as melancholy—as himself, one might say."

Pauline felt angry. What business had this girl to speak in such a tone of Gérard?

"People who like him may like his house, then, I suppose," she said. "Have you been there lately?"

"Never since I was a child. But I

don't change in those things. To be sure, I used to like the woods then, and our house in the midst of them—a funny place, which no doubt you will see. But then I used to play with the Maulévrier boys, and it was for their sake I liked it all. I am sorry to be grown up," said Françoise, with a little sigh.

"Did you play with the Marquis?"

"No, he was too old and grand. With his brothers Victor and Léon, and the little Jules, too, the youngest, such a pretty boy. He is in the navy. Which do you like best of the three you have seen?"

"The Marquis. I hardly know the others. And you?"

"Me! What a droll question! I do not think I can answer it," said Françoise. She pressed her fan against

her lips, and looked at Pauline over it with a smile. "And you, mademoiselle —pardon me for asking, but English people are so interesting, their ways are so different from ours—it is really true, is it, that madame your mother has not arranged a marriage for you? In her own mind, surely—eh?"

Pauline was inclined to laugh, and yet she felt a vague uneasiness.

"No," she said, "my mother has not arranged a marriage for me, and I don't think she ever will. Who told you anything about it?"

"My mother was curious and asked Madame Mowbray. There is nothing surprising in that, is there? People as beautiful as you generally marry very young; and if they do in France, surely they must in England, where you do not trouble yourselves so much

about the 'dot.' You see, I know something of your customs. Mon Dieu! I would give a great deal to be beautiful like you."

"What strange things you say!" said Pauline.

"O, not at all! It is only the truth. I should get my own way perhaps, if I had a pretty complexion and eyes as blue as the sea. I should say, 'I will not live in that—' Well, it is no use complaining and wishing; only—pardon—do you put anything on your face to give it that soft look?"

Pauline felt herself half-repelled, half-attracted by this strange little being who was gazing at her so earnestly. Françoise laid her small, thin, brown hand, with its long pointed nails, beside the prettily-dimpled white one.

"Your hands, too!" she said. "No

soap in the world would make mine that colour."

"I suppose I must say it is all natural," said Pauline, laughing. "At any rate, I use nothing more uncommon than cold water."

"Ah, how unfair! Now you must ask me some questions. I was determined to talk to you a little before you went away, though I know mamma thinks English people rather dangerous, especially Protestants. But I think some Protestants may possibly go to heaven—you will, certainly—'les yeux bleus vont aux cieux.' What colour are my eyes, do you think? Not green, I hope; for that is a very bad fate. But I never can make up my mind about them."

"Your eyes change colour; that is the prettiest thing of all, as we are paying compliments," said Pauline. "But I think they are gray."

"Ah, well, that is not so bad—'Paradis.' And Gérard de Maulévrier's?"

"Black, are they? I really don't know."

"He will be in purgatory, then, and he will deserve it, for looking so miserable on earth. And you like him; you are glad to be going to his house—is it possible? And you are not afraid of Madame de Maulévrier?"

"Why should I be afraid of her? Is she disagreeable?"

"Ah, mon Dieu! I dare not say what I think of her. And the worst of it is that he worships her, and means to live with her all his days. She has certainly done her best for him. She has made her other sons renounce their succession, that he may be able to marry and live at that dreadful old place. He *means* to live there; but we shall see."

"I suppose it depends on his wife," said Pauline. "If she is good enough for him she will do anything to make him happy."

"And if she is not good enough for him—as that is your idea—"

Françoise bent forward, with an odd, curious expression, and gazed into her companion's face. Pauline returned her gaze steadily. Whatever feeling might have stirred in the depths of her soul, it was not likely to be betrayed to this girl.

"Then it will be a great pity," she said; "and I shall be sorry for them both."

"Especially for him?"

"Yes; especially for him."

"I knew it," said Françoise, under her breath. "Certainly it is a pity; because, do you see, mademoiselle, it is me—wicked me. What do you say now?"

"You! I don't quite understand," said Pauline, bewildered, not unnaturally, by her recollections of the few past days.

Françoise shrugged her shoulders.

"You had not guessed it?" she said. "Yes, it has been arranged for us. The estates run into each other, you know, Maulévrier and the Maison Blanche. So we must make the best of it. I don't think he will be difficult to live with. I shall not die, unless it is of ennui."

Plain-spoken as Françoise was, Pauline did not feel that she could put any of her thoughts into words in return.

"I am very much surprised," she said. "No, I had not guessed it. I hope you will be happier than you think."

Steps and voices were coming nearer. Françoise heard them, if her companion did not.

"Listen," she said. "I have told you a secret, because things are not formally settled yet; and I was forbidden to mention it to anybody. May I trust you to keep my secret? Every one will know soon enough."

"I will tell no one," answered Pauline —"except my mother," suddenly and earnestly. "I may tell her, may I not?"

Françoise had only time for an assenting look, for Gérard, tall against the golden twilight, came strolling up, and stood bareheaded before them.

"We shall soon be able to see the glowworms," he said. "Will you come and look for them on the terrace, mesdemoiselles?"

So, among orange-blossoms and other strange foreign things, ended this Sunday at Tourlyon.

CHAPTER X.

THE RICH AUNT.

MISS LUCIA MOWBRAY, by right of her riches, was the chief person in the family. She was George Mowbray's aunt, or rather his half-aunt; for his grandfather had married twice. The first wife was the mother of one son, the father of George and his brothers and sisters. The second wife was a Miss Dunstan, an heiress, of an old Somersetshire family. As her fortune was settled upon her own children, it all came to her only daughter, Lucia, who had never married, and could leave it to whoever she pleased. She was now getting on for seventy, and no

one knew who was to be her successor. She was known to have made several wills and destroyed them. She was a woman of many whims. No one could be more generous when it suited her fancy, and when her heart was touched; but she had no notion of managing her affairs on any steady principle. She alternately made a pet of George Mowbray and laughed at him; she respected his wife and laughed at her. His brothers and sisters seldom came in her way. They and their children wrote her affectionate letters; she was friendly with them all, but never asked them to stay with her. That treat was reserved for George and his children, who lived nearest to her.

The Mowbrays generally were supposed to think that if Aunt Lucia did her duty she would divide her fortune among

them all, leaving her house to the eldest —a hard-working barrister. But Aunt Lucia's view of her duty was not at all certain to be the same as theirs; and she had alarmed them a few years ago by a very eccentric proceeding.

There was an account in the newspapers of a dreadful fever which had seized upon one of the northern colliery districts. It was almost as bad as the Eyam fever that everybody has read of: the people died by hundreds, and the difficulty was to find any one to nurse the sick or bury the dead. Still, one may be assured that the stricken place was not without its devoted men and women, whose courage and humanity became heroic action when they were called out thus.

Miss Lucia Mowbray sat in her study in the south, and read the accounts of

this fever. One of the prominent names among those who were spending themselves in self-forgetting work was that of a curate, Benjamin Dunstan. It was an uncommon name, and Miss Mowbray watched for further news of him. Presently she saw that his work was over for a time: the fever had seized upon him, and he lay hopelessly ill among his dying people. Miss Mowbray was very uneasy; she could think of nothing but this young man, the owner of her old family name, dying alone among coal-pits and blackness and misery. She hardly knew who he could be. The only Dunstan she knew of was an utterly good-for-nothing cousin, who had gone out unmarried to Australia years before. Being impatient and curious, she wrote a letter of inquiry to the vicar of the town which lay nearest to the fever

district, and had his characteristic answer by return of post.

"Dear Madam,—The story of my friend Ben Dunstan is a remarkable one. It is, perhaps, already finished; for I doubt whether the poor fellow is alive at this moment. He is probably a relation of yours. I have heard him say that his father belonged to Somersetshire. but he was not likely to make himself known to you, for Ben, though certainly a poor relation, is not one of the sort that comes to beg. He was born in Western Australia, where his father and mother died. Ben was then sixteen and friendless. He packed up his small fortune in a belt round his waist, worked his way home to England on board various ships and made straight for Cambridge, where he lived for two years in a garret, working night and day. By this time he knew

more than many dons, for his one idea from his cradle has been to educate himself, and he has an astonishing memory. My brother, who is a tutor at Wolsey, got hold of him and gave him a few hints, after which Ben went in for a Wolsey scholarship, and got it easily. After leaving college he came to his present curacy at Forest Moor; but the climate is too cold for him, and his health was spoilt before these trying times came upon him. Now he is dying in harness like a brave soldier. Though his life has not been rosy, I never heard him once complain, or suggest that he might have been better used. He has made a fight for it, and I honour the fellow, and am sorry that your interest in him was not awakened before it was too late, which I fear is the case now. But Ben was never the man to hunt up his rich con-

nections. As to his present position, he has neighbours' fare, and that is not luxurious. I would go to him myself; but I was always clumsy about nursing; and other claims—those of my wife and children, and my large parish—must come before those of poor Ben and his infectious fever. I shall be glad to answer any further questions, or to carry out your wishes in any way.—Believe me, yours truly, "JOHN SMITH."

"Poor dear fellow! He is Robert's son, of course, though why on earth they called him Benjamin!" exclaimed Miss Mowbray to her nephew George, who was at breakfast with her when she received this letter. "What can I do for him? I can't send anybody, and I can't have him here; but I must do something."

"You can have him here as soon as

they can move him safely," said George, with cheerful unworldliness.

"Of course I can. I must write at once to this worthy Mr. Smith, and tell him so. I hope he isn't dead, for I feel as if he would interest me."

"The young fellow? O, no, he won't die," said George.

He did not repent of his suggestion, though his wife lifted up her eyebrows when she heard of it—not even when Ben Dunstan, well on in his recovery, came and stayed the whole winter with Miss Mowbray at Croome Court. He was an odd creature, rough, grave, and yet cheerful, with broad and Radical ideas which did not at all suit the neighbourhood. His manners were considered detestible, and nobody liked him much except Miss Mowbray herself, and George with his wide sympathies.

In the spring he declared himself quite well, and escaped back joyfully to his old work at Forest Moor. He held on there for two or three more years, suffering constantly from the cold north-country air, after which the Rector of Croome went away to a better living, and Miss Mowbray, to most people's consternation, offered Croome to her cousin Ben. He was not much obliged to her, for he disliked the people and ways of the south; but after all it seemed weak to stay where he was and die in three or four years, as the doctors prophesied. So he accepted Miss Mowbray's offer, and came down to Croome.

"I sha'n't stay here all my life, you know," was the first thing he said to her.

"Nobody asked you to do that," said Miss Mowbray. "Stay as long as you can bear us."

Ben Dunstan had now been at Croome two years. He was quite strong again and was beginning to grow restless. The best of the people down there liked him better than at first, though he did not try to please them; he did his duty in an uncompromising sort of way, and the civil manners of the south were wasted upon him. The labourers seemed to him a poor, dull set, abjectly contented, or else afraid to speak their minds. Miss Mowbray declared that the Rector had spent a whole afternoon trying to make her gardener strike for higher wages, and then had come in to call on her, muttering,

> "Wretch, whom no sense of wrongs can rouse to vengeance,
> Spiritless outcast!"

Ben Dunstan made a habit of coming to see Miss Mowbray between four and five on Sunday afternoon, when his

service in church was over. He was always happiest on Sundays; it was his holiday, and the only day on which he seemed able to enjoy the lovely country he lived in. The high rocky fields with their wide blue distances, the deep lanes and romantic valleys, coloured red, gray, and green, with here and there a picturesque half-hidden cottage, like a nest of stones and thatch, were not quite so desolate to him as on week-days. He used to walk down from his pretty rectory to the Court, if one must confess it, with a pipe in his mouth and a rose in his buttonhole, a white fox-terrier, his dearest friend, keeping close at his heels. Such ways as these made people say that he was neither clerical nor gentlemanlike. In his dress, too, he consulted comfort more than correctness. But, you see, he was a young man from the Black Country,

springing originally from Australia—a person quite sure to be out of place in a really respectable English parish.

So, one summer Sunday afternoon, he came in this guise down the hill. Croome Court lay in a hollow by the river, far below the level of the church and rectory. It was a large old house, which had once been much larger. The Dunstans, unlike their descendant Miss Mowbray, had been a prudent race, and had pulled the place down by degrees to lessen their expenses. One of them had built a mill quite close to the Court—so near that its buildings were only divided from the garden by a high wall and a row of elm-trees. The road passed not far from the front of the house, which had an air of Queen Anne. Its lower windows were arched with thick branches of wistaria, and the smooth lawn in front was bright

with flowers. The rest of the garden, with the stable yard behind it, was away to the right of the house; the mill, hidden by stately old trees, was on the left. All this lay between the road and the little river, which wandered away into meadows where old thorn bushes clustered, and forest trees were scattered here and there. Miss Mowbray had let the mill and the farms, and all the land up to her gates. She had no taste for farming, but cared a good deal for her garden, where the flowers grew as if they returned her affection.

People said that her life must be very dull; if so, it was her own fault. But she was an odd woman, and did not love her neighbours much; and very few of them were capable of understanding her. Her eldest nephew, the barrister, said that Aunt Lucia ought to have lived in London,

where she would have been both amused and appreciated. Once or twice she had talked the subject over with him seriously, but she went on living comfortably at Croome.

Her drawing-room was a very large square room, full of pretty things and comfortable old-fashioned furniture. She always lived in it; her books and work were scattered about on tables and sofas, and her favourite plants were in a conservatory outside one of the windows. There were several large mirrors, before which she sometimes stopped to look at herself. This was a habit that the young Mowbrays thought quite dreadful in a great-aunt nearly seventy. Their father told them that a little vanity was not a bad thing in a woman, and that he remembered Aunt Lucia the most fascinating of women.

"She's that still in my opinion," he said, chivalrously.

"Oh, papa!" howled a chorus.

"Yes, you cubs," said Mr. Mowbray, "with your red hands and burnt faces, do you suppose beauty and elegance come to a woman entirely in spite of herself?"

"Why, there's Polly!" cried one of the younger girls. "*She* never looks in the glass."

"O, doesn't she?" said Mr. Mowbray, smiling.

"Well, she won't when she's Aunt Lucia's age."

"Probably not, if she never does now."

When the Rector came in that afternoon Miss Mowbray was watering her ferns in the conservatory. He took the watering-pot and finished them for her;

then they went back into the wide shady drawing-room, and Ben, who was hot and tired, threw himself into an armchair. Miss Mowbray looked at him and smiled kindly. It was a mystery why these two people should like each other so much, they were such an utter contrast in everything.

Ben Dunstan was a very solid-looking young man. He was rather short, broad and square; even his face was square, with a most decided chin. His forehead was low and broad, and he had a habit of frowning; his hair had a tendency to curl, not prettily, but stiffly and obstinately. His eyes alone brightened up a heavy and grave face; they were very intelligent, of a lively hazel colour, with the light rim round the iris that gives a certain flash and spirit to some people's glance. There was nothing refined about

Mr. Dunstan's appearance; he was only not coarse-looking; his father might have been a blacksmith or a wagoner. He was a man, that was all, with a will and a character, accidentally born a gentleman.

It may seem strange to draw a comparison between a young man and an old woman, but it was still more strange that those two should be relations. Miss Lucia Mowbray was tall, slight, delicate, made altogether after the fashion of an aristocrat. Though she stooped a little, her pretty shoulders still retained their grace. She was like a lovely piece of thin old china. Her face was wonderfully pretty, as well in expression as in features; it was all life and fun, gentleness, cleverness with a touch of irony; when she smiled, it was like a spirit breaking through the thinnest veil of material. With all this, there was a

glance in her large blue eyes—they were still young—which gave one the idea of a not very sensible woman. Her strong-minded severe great-nephews and nieces thought she was very silly; but young people cannot always understand the youth of old age. She had none of what one may call the airs of an old woman —I mean the authority, the taking a certain position proper to grandmothers and great-aunts and old ladies generally, especially rich ones. And this was not because she had never married. Lucia Mowbray would have been exactly the same woman if she had been married three times over. She had her own graceful, careless, simple, unaffected ways; she acted according to her humours; she often wore clothes that orthodox people thought too young for her; she sat in no special chair, had a

hundred little fancies, and was always wandering about the house and garden. She was idle, and yet occupied; thoughtless, and yet kind-hearted; full of faults and inconsistencies, and yet charming.

Mr. Dunstan began to talk to his patroness about parish matters. There were two or three old charities at Croome, endowed by his ancestors, which it was his dearest wish to sweep entirely away; they pauperised the people, he said, and were quite out of date.

"A great many of our people would be in the workhouse without them," said Miss Mowbray.

"So they tell you, of course. But I know that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is a man's own fault if he comes to the workhouse. Give him fair wages, let him be industrious and saving,

and don't starve his soul by giving him alms—he will be all right enough. These doles are enough to ruin the morals of a whole parish, and they have done their work uncommonly well at Croome."

"What nonsense you talk!" said Miss Mowbray; "the people are poor and one must help them. These charities are a blessing to them."

"No, a curse. The system is bad from its foundation."

"That does not signify to me," said Miss Mowbray.

"I should have thought it did."

"No; I think the founders of these things were probably much wiser than I am, and I would rather plant things than pull them up."

"Of course, planting is a very fine thing; but—"

"You think I have not done much in

that way? Why, I have planted *you*, and now you can't find room for yourself in the parish without pulling up all the institutions older than yourself. What a restless spirit you are! Grow, can't you, and let the old roots alone. The soil of England is full of them; you won't find a clear place for yourself!"

"That notion of being planted is a very awful one," said Ben, looking at her gravely. "It won't do at all. That was partly what I wanted to talk to you about. If I can't do anything here, you know, that settles the question. I had better go at once."

"Because of the charities?"

"Not entirely," said Ben, "though you know my objection to all those old things. But I am doing no good here. I preach my very best to the people; they don't listen—they gape and snore. If they do

hear a few words, they go home and say, 'Never heard a parson talk a that'ns.' I never shall get used to their humbugging ways. 'Please, zur—' I'm sick of the sound of it. When I gave them those science lectures last winter, they thought it was witchcraft. They are sly, too; they say and do things behind one's back. You are never sure you have got at the worst of them."

"You are tired of not being appreciated?" said Miss Mowbray.

"I wish it was only that—I could manage that sort of tiredness. But don't you see—besides my character, and ways, and teaching being quite unsuited to them, it is simply a waste of strength. Here am I," said Ben, stretching out his arms, "a great powerful fellow, with a loud voice that would fill any church, and a taste for work among masses of

people. This little place has been a rest to me, of course. I should most likely have died if I had not come here. I don't forget that, I assure you. I'm very thankful for all that."

"Don't let me hear of anything so degrading and soul-starving as thankfulness," said Miss Mowbray, turning away and putting up her hands.

The rector smiled. He was used to this sort of teasing, and apparently rather liked it. As he was silent Miss Mowbray became more serious. She took a chair near him, and looked at him with an air of thoughtful consideration.

"You want to go away, then?" she said. "Is there nothing that would keep you here? I would rather have you than any one else."

"Thank you. But I cannot see that I am of any use to you."

"No, certainly you are not. In fact you are troublesome; you put all sorts of inconvenient things into one's head. And of course it is your duty to go away, as you don't like the people. I understand that. You would not do anything so disagreeable to me, unless you really felt it was your duty."

Ben sat looking at her with a slow, quaint smile. "When you put it in that way—" he began.

"No," said she, "I don't put it in that way. It is unfair and selfish. But I shall be sorry for myself and all these poor creatures, if we lose you. If there is anything I can do to keep you here, I will do it. I will, really."

"You are very good, but I would rather not be bribed," said Ben. "There are lots of men who would suit you and the place better than I do. I told you

when I first came that I should not spend my life here. I have had no reason at all to alter that intention. I have tried my hand at it, and it won't do. I am the square man in the round hole. You won't dispute that, at least?"

"Sticking firmly to truth, I don't think I can," said Miss Mowbray. "But still, my square friend, I think you might adapt yourself. This country is good for you physically, if not mentally. Shall I give you a prescription for getting rid of your restlessness?"

"If you like."

"Marry."

Ben whistled rather ruefully, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't you like the idea?" said Miss Mowbray.

"I never thought about it much. I am not fond of ladies' society, as you

know; and a clergyman's wife is generally a hindrance to him."

"Nonsense!"

"Well, I wonder what I should have done at Forest Moor with a wife and six small children hanging on to me."

"You would have learnt the meaning of self-sacrifice," said Miss Mowbray.

"However, this is not a savage place like Forest Moor, but a nice healthy village with a house much too large for a bachelor. So don't argue in that silly way. And don't speak rudely of women in my presence, if you wish me to respect you. Did you never see any one you would have liked to marry?"

"I have seen one woman that I admired," said Ben, gruffly. "But I might as well whistle for the moon. And she is too ornamental for every day, besides. That is the worst of it.

If a poor parson marries at all, it ought to be some one who can bake and sew, and trudge about and rough it altogether as he does himself. To marry a fine lady would be simple ruin. Not that she is a fine lady, but she has been petted and cared for all her life. And as the other kind of women does not attract me, I had better make up my mind to stay as I am."

"Ah! you don't like to trust yourself to stay in our neighbourhood, with the chance of seeing her every month or two, and feeling obliged to make yourself out as bearish as possible, for fear she might take a fancy to you. Men are funny things, truly," said his cousin.

"What are you talking about?"

"I thought that was it. Poor Ben! But I don't see why you should give it up as a hopeless case. *I* have no ob-

jection to your marrying Pauline. On the contrary, I should rather like it."

"Thank you," said Ben, frowning, and looking on the ground. "But that does not make much difference, I'm afraid."

Miss Mowbray lifted her eyebrows. "Doesn't it?" she said, with a little laugh. "Then what are the obstacles? Why shouldn't you? Do you think she would say no? You are too modest; you have too little confidence in yourself."

"Well," said Ben, "when one looks at it reasonably, it does not seem clear that she would refuse one. She may be ambitious, I don't know; but it is a large family, and her father and I are good friends. I think I could make her as comfortable as she is at home. She would be well looked after, but I should give up everything I have lived for

hitherto. You can't give your whole heart to two things at once. There is nothing truer than that."

Miss Mowbray nodded and smiled. "I withdraw my accusation," she said. "I see you have some confidence in yourself. But I want to talk to you seriously. As I know your very best secret, we may as well be quite candid with each other. Do you think people are ever mistaken in what they call their duty?"

"Not often, if they are honest," said Ben.

"Don't you think that circumstances may alter, and duties with them? If you owned this property, for instance, would you think it right to go off and work at Forest Moor, and spend all your money on the people there? Wouldn't you consider that Croome had some claims upon you? Now suppose I was

to die to-morrow, and that everything was left to you—what would you do?"

"Is that a fair question?" said Ben, with a grim smile. "I might spoil my prospects by the answer."

"Don't joke, now. I wish to be serious."

"You will allow that a man has a perfect right to do as he likes with his own."

"Yes; but a man's right is not always his duty. You talk so much about duty. What would it be in that case?"

"To begin with, I hope you will do no such thing," said Ben. "Parson and squire in one seems to me a hopeless muddle. I have no love for the place because my ancestors lived in it, rather the contrary. I should build new schools, get a Board established, drain some of the low meadows, and then go away. I

should feel that I had done my duty by the place, if I let or sold it to a good man. I should present some honest fellow to the living, and then wash my hands of the whole affair."

Miss Mowbray gazed at her cousin, half in surprise, half in amusement.

"You have no wish to be a rich man, then?" she said, after a minute or two.

"Yes. I should like well enough to have money," answered Ben. "But not hung round my neck in the shape of land."

"How tiresome you are! I shall leave it to Pauline, and tie it up so that you can't get at it for your philanthropic craze."

"Yes, leave it to her, and then it will be out of my way altogether. Not that we have either of us any right to it."

"Nobody has. Yours is the best, because you have the old name, though you don't value that as you ought."

"No, I don't, except for one reason. I must go now," said Ben, getting up from his comfortable chair. "We have had rather an odd sort of talk, it seems to me."

He gave himself a slight stretch and shake like a dog roused up. He had been sitting in the same attitude all the time, while Miss Mowbray, who was never still for more than three minutes, moved from place to place about the room.

"Yes, rather odd," said she, "and one I am not likely to forget. No one ever threatened me with selling Croome Court before."

Ben smiled. "If you are looking out for some one to leave it to, why don't

you choose George Mowbray? He is very fond of the place. It would be fairer, on the whole, than leaving it to one of his children—a girl, too, who might marry anybody."

"No. I have my reasons for not doing that. Dear George is something of a fool, and his wife is a worldly woman."

"You are hard on them, I think. Good-bye."

"Don't go yet," said Miss Mowbray. "I had a letter this morning, which you may read, if you like."

The letter was from Mrs. Mowbray, and dated from Tourlyon.

"What, they are with all those French people still?" said Ben.

"Yes; they will come back quite foreign."

Mrs. Mowbray never told Aunt Lucia

anything that she thought would displease her, but a letter from Tourlyon could not help being full of Gérard de Maulévrier, and the approaching visit to his château. Pauline's mother could only say of her that she was perfectly happy, and felt as if she was living in a story-book. Mrs. Mowbray herself would not be very sorry to see England again. She supposed that, on leaving Maulévrier, they would extend their tour, and visit some more towns, so that they were not likely to be back for a month or so.

This letter gave the Rector something to think about. He walked away from the Court more slowly than usual, lost, as it were, in a wood of châteaux and marquises. He crossed the bridge by the mill, and followed the footpath across low green meadows, along by the

hedge of thickly-waving corn-fields, gradually climbing the hill. The church stood on a high ledge of ground at the head of a wild rocky valley. Its white spire was backed up by a fir-wood, beyond which was the rectory, a pretty gabled house in a garden. The house was covered with clematis and roses. It had a large shady porch, and the rooms in it, though very plainly furnished, were as civilised as if their owner had been a man of artistic taste, instead of a plain rough fellow like Ben Dunstan.

CHAPTER XI.

THROUGH THE FOREST.

FRANÇOISE DE BRYE need not have been anxious about the keeping of her secret, for Pauline, after all, did not even find strength to tell her mother. It would have been hardly possible to do so without betraying a feeling that now filled her with pain and shame. This happy spoiled child, used only to the summer days of life, loved, admired, and considered first by all her own people, had never imagined the possibility of such a self-deception as this. She was too generous to blame Gérard; besides, on second thoughts, she told herself plainly that only a fanciful

idiot could have misunderstood him. How could she so easily have forgotten the difference in mind and manners between him and her countrymen? The idea of fancying that a Frenchman was in love with one, because he was charmingly polite and a little sentimental! Pauline laughed at herself, and felt very hard and cool about it; yet her heart was dreadfully sore, and she could not trust herself to tell her mother of the engagement.

She lay awake that night full of self-reproach and self-pity; this would push in, in spite of the sternest resolutions. It was very sad, the finding out suddenly that one was a stranger in this land, and must not expect to have any real interest here. Only a passing spectator, a mere tourist, foolish enough to lose her heart where nobody cared to find it. Her eyes

were hot and dim with tears. Presently, in a sudden fit of home-sickness, she got up, and began a letter to Aunt Lucia in England, full of longings to be back again. Aunt Lucia might often be very provoking; but Pauline knew that she loved her, and those visits to Croome Court, which the young Mowbrays were accustomed to call "duty visits," seemed now to this desolate exile times of perfect safety and repose. Aunt Lucia had not approved of the tour, except for one reason—that it would teach Pauline to value her own country. The Rector, who had walked in just then, and who always took advantage of his position to say tiresome things, had agreed with her, adding some ignorant jokes about Frenchmen and frogs. Pauline had thought them both very stupid and disagreeable. But now she

forgave Aunt Lucia, who, after all, knew something of the world, and reminded herself of the Rector's goodness, not to say heroism. He was not ornamental, certainly; but there was no deception in him.

With this kind thought of her English admirer, who would have been thankful to know it, Pauline found herself getting very sleepy, and thought she had better perhaps leave the letter to be finished another time. Kind Nature, which was given to blessing Pauline, sent her to sleep as soon as her fair head touched the pillow.

When she awoke, Mrs. Mowbray was standing dressed by her side; the sun was shining, the church-bells were ringing: all the gay morning noises of Tourlyon were going on in the streets. Mrs. Mowbray kissed her child, who

woke smiling, but almost immediately sighed and said, "After all, mother, I wish we were going home to-day instead of to Maulévrier."

"Why? are you a little home-sick?" said Mrs. Mowbray, cheerfully. "I know the feeling too; but it will be great fun, and we shall have so much to talk about afterwards."

"Yes," said Pauline, and she did not go on to any explanations.

Of course one could not change one's plans now without some tolerable reason. Everything was just the same, except her own silly feelings, which must be hidden from everybody; and she was thankful for the French girl's confidence, which had waked her in time from a dangerous, foolish dream. In the light of morning she felt braver and less morbid. She read over the half-written

letter to Aunt Lucia, smiled, and tore it up, wondering a little at her own childishness.

Madame de Maulévrier's large carriage received them all—the Marquis and his three English friends, now become his guests. They drove away into the country, first along a straight smooth road bordered by lines of tall poplars, beyond which were green meadows and apple orchards. The road grew wilder as they went on, climbing out of the valley of the Yonne. For some time they kept along the side of a steep slope, the descent from the forest lands into the plain. Above them lay a broad belt of stony ground and heather, with goats climbing about, watched by gipsy-looking children, and here and there a patch of vineyard fenced with turf and stones. Below, on the other side of the

broad even road that skirted the hill, long green slopes, varied with trees, with a small field of corn or colza, a farmhouse, or a group of dirty picturesque cottages, ran down into the low ground. The road itself was bordered on this lower side by great Spanish chestnut-trees, whose stately growth and beautiful shining leaves gave the whole foreground a look of dignity. Between and over them one caught glimpses of the plain, with here and there a sparkle of water, with white church-spires and the soaring roofs of châteaux, and blue hills far away. Tourlyon was left behind farther down the valley: but by looking back one could still catch sight of its crowding towers, faint and gray against the misty horizon.

Further on they drove through miles of pine forest, where the road was soft

and heavy, where the sun gleamed through the red stems, and the wind above sighed and rushed gently, like a summer sea. Then other woods, chiefly of oak and delicate silver birch, all made glorious by the tall waving plumes of golden broom that grew high up among the trees, and then fell in bright showers across the dark background. Among the fir-woods there were strange sandy places, where the road cut through yellow rocks all tufted with fern and blooming purple heather. It was all wild, luxuriant, and lonely; cheerful enough on a sunny afternoon like this, but full of suggestions of dreariness.

As they drove deeper into these forests, where the only sound of human life was the jingle of their harness-bells, Gérard talked a good deal and told them stories. They all listened eagerly,

Mr. Mowbray and Pauline quite carried away by these romantic scenes and their histories. Mrs. Mowbray, though by no means a nervous woman, was almost alarmed at finding herself, as it seemed, getting farther and farther away from the common round of civilised life. As Gérard described wolf and boar hunts in these very woods, her eyes wandered anxiously down into the green glades beside the road. That corner by the sandy rocks had been a famous haunt of robbers years ago. The heavy coaches of the time were generally upset there, the ruts were so deep, and this gave the "larrons" their opportunity. It was nearly a hundred years ago; but this spot was still supposed by the peasants to be haunted by a well-known highwayman.

"In the great Revolution," said

Gérard, "M. de Brye's grandfather was obliged to fly from the mob and hide himself in these woods. He found a little cave in those rocks, and managed to live there for some days; but at last they found him and dragged him back to the Maison Blanche. They had a grand idea, to make him set his house on fire with his own hands. He did it, too."

"What became of him afterwards?" said Mr. Mowbray.

"They let him go, and he escaped to Germany. I think I would rather have died."

Then Mr. Mowbray asked something about the Germans in the late war.

"They did not venture into these forests," said Gérard, looking gloomily down.

Pauline wished her father had not alluded to the war.

At last the road became less wild and solitary; there was a break in the woods; vineyards and cornfields began to appear again on the sunny slopes. But it was still a forest country. Then the horses stopped at a high point of the road, where a stone crucifix stood on three mossy steps, its foot heaped with votive wreaths of beads, and faded leaves and flowers. Gérard stood up in the carriage, and offered his hand to Pauline.

"If these ladies will stand up for a moment," he said, smiling, "they will see Maulévrier."

"What, already!" said Mr. Mowbray.

Pauline stood up, her heart beating strangely, and looked past the crucifix, across the waves of varied green to where those ridges of steep gray roof were shining in the sun. She thought,

even at this distance, that Gérard's home was worthy of him, but she was troubled by her own agitation, and said nothing. It did not seem necessary, for her father and mother were eager in their admiration. Gérard looked at her a little curiously; it perhaps struck him that the charming English girl had lost some of her frank enthusiasm. She felt that he was looking, but did not turn her eyes that way. He was disappointed, but Pauline would not see it. She stood gazing across the wooded valley, finding out by degrees the church-spire, the roofs of houses just showing down below, the poplars in the village street.

"Your house is quite regal," said Mr. Mowbray, turning to Gérard. "Of course you are Legitimist: a man could not live in a place like that and be anything else. It is ancient régime all over.

You have oubliettes, no doubt. Do you put your peasants into them?"

"The peasants are not mine, do you see, monsieur," said Gérard. "Madame, why does Monsieur Mowbray refuse to believe that we Legitimists are civilised, and love the people?"

"I cannot tell. Because he is very stupid, and very prejudiced," said Mrs. Mowbray, smiling, as she sat down. "But really I feel as if I was going to stay in a feudal castle. I had no idea your situation was so stately and beautiful, and such a very long way from everywhere."

"Isn't it refreshing!" said her husband. "No railway, no telegraph—no post, I was almost going to say."

"O, you are quite mistaken; we are within three leagues of a railway. Go on," said M. de Maulévrier to the

coachman; and they started off at full swing down the hill.

Madame de Maulévrier and her second son had never suited each other very well. Victor was a man of the world, the modern world which his mother hated. As a boy, he had rebelled against the strict life of the château, and had tried unsuccessfully to make Gérard rebel too. To do him justice, however, he had never shown any jealousy of Gérard, and since he had grown up and entered the army his mother had had no fault to find with him. In his visits to Maulévrier he conformed quietly to all her rules, and she did not trouble herself as to what he thought of them. She had the outward respect and obedience which every French son pays to his mother, and this was enough from Victor, though it would have been

sadly too little from Gérard. She and Victor were, in reality, strangers to each other, and never likely to become anything else.

Victor had looked forward with some dismay to the two days of clockwork existence that would have to be passed at Maulévrier before Gérard and his friends arrived. Life alone with his mother was a serious thing. He could only smoke by stealth. "Triboulet" and his kind were interdicted; the lightest reading was the *Figaro*. Cards must not be even mentioned, nor dancing, nor acting; politics must only be talked within certain limits. Every kind of modern art, in books, painting, music, was hateful to the Marquise. The breath of scandal was never heard in her house; nothing light or weak of any kind was to be found there. Victor

often wondered how his brother Gérard could have grown up so freely in this narrow place, with wide sympathies and a refined education. He did not do justice to the clearness and purity of such an air as this, sweet and bracing in its sharp thinness to those souls who can breathe in it at all. Like the dwellers on mountain-tops, they are melancholy; but like them, too, they can look up straight into the blue sky, without any clouds of smoke between.

After all, Victor's two days alone with his mother passed off fairly well. He thought she was more indulgent than she used to be; at any rate, he did not feel himself so much criticised and disapproved of. But afterwards he thought that this was mere indifference, her mind being occupied with other things. Gérard had been quite right in

proposing to bring the Mowbrays to Maulévrier. She liked to think of his having made friends with a man who had known and respected his father, and she had many things in her mind to say to Mr. Mowbray—recollections of her husband, which she thought he would care to hear; questions to ask about him. She also wished in her heart to reward Gérard for his dutiful behaviour about Mademoiselle de Brye.

Victor found no difficulty this time in making conversation for his mother. Gérard's doings at Tourlyon, the family of Brye, their ways and their plans, were subjects of endless interest. Victor did his duty thoroughly; he spoke with esteem of Monsieur and Madame de Brye, with admiration of Françoise. Madame de Maulévrier listened a little doubtfully, though she was pleased.

Victor had spoken strongly, for him, and had apparently given her some reason for thought. As they sat in the salon after breakfast, on the day that Gérard and his friends were expected, she at her usual needlework, he turning over the *Union* and thinking of a cigar, she said suddenly, and rather sternly, "Mademoiselle de Brye has a character, then?"

"Certainly, ma mère, and a very decided one," said Victor, looking at her gravely.

"I suppose it is best so?"

"Can there be any doubt about it?"

"Yes, a great deal," said Madame de Maulévrier. "It may often be a mistake for a young girl to have a character. All that ought to arrange itself after she is married. Mademoiselle de Brye's character, for instance, might not suit Gérard's. He has one, you know."

"Without doubt. But Mademoiselle Fanni is so well brought up that I think you need not fear."

"What did you call her?" said the Marquise, sharply.

"Fanni, the old name I knew when we were children."

"I do not like those baby names," said the Marquise: "you are not children any more, and they are better forgotten."

"It is true," said Victor.

His tone was a little sad, but Madame de Maulévrier did not notice it; she was not thinking of him. Neither of them spoke for two or three minutes. It was one of those silences that Victor often declared to exist nowhere but at Maulévrier. The old clock ticked slowly, but though it was in the middle of the day, all the house was profoundly

still, and not a sound came in at the open windows.

"Have you read Bismarck's last speech, ma mère?" said Victor at last returning to his newspaper.

"Merci! I prefer to ignore his existence," replied Madame de Maulévrier.

Victor smiled a little grimly, and wondered how soon he would be able to escape.

"What sort of person is the daughter of this Englishman?" asked his mother.

"Well, Gérard thinks her beautiful, and she certainly is a fine young woman. She is tall, like her mother, fair, blue eyes, an English beauty. A style that I do not admire so much as Gérard does."

His mother raised her eyes from her tapestry, and fixed them upon him.

"Can I trust you, Victor?" she said.

He gazed at her in astonishment. Her face was as hard as ever; there was no affection in it for him; her rare smiles and softenings were kept for Gérard, as her confidences had always been.

"Trust me? certainly; you know it," he answered, quietly.

"It is about Gérard," she went on in a lowered voice. "Since he went to Tourlyon I have discovered something; it was in the blotting-book on the table in his room. I only ask you because I cannot ask him. It seemed to explain things that he had said to me; and if you could reassure me—"

Victor's whole attention was bent upon her; in his dark steady eyes there was a reflection of her own natural sternness, and for some reason she felt herself hesitating and changing colour.

"In plain words," she said, "Gérard

is in love with somebody. Who is it? Tell me. You are his brother, and likely to know; young men tell their secrets to each other. You can trust me as I trust you."

"Yes, I am your son," said Victor.

It sounded a little theatrical. If he meant to touch her heart for himself, he quite failed, for she was only thinking of Gérard.

"How did you discover it?" he said. "What did Gérard say to you? I do not quite understand."

"It was a paper of verses; a farewell to somebody," said Madame de Maulévrier. "What did he say? Why he pretended he did not wish to marry. But it cannot have been anyone possible or he would have told me her name."

"An imaginary woman, probably," said Victor. "Poetical fellows like

Gérard are always doing that sort of thing."

"Why cannot you be frank with me—tell me the truth!" exclaimed Madame de Maulévrier. "Imaginary—absurd! he hoped to meet her in paradise. You think he would not wish me to know. He has made you swear not to tell me perhaps? Your mother is an unhappy creature among you all."

"My mother, do not vex yourself in this way," said Victor, gently. "I never heard of this lady, and even now I can hardly believe in her existence. Anyhow, Gérard is quite resigned. You would have been satisfied if you had seen him at Tourlyon. These poets always have ideals out of reach. They have two lives, do you see? It is the way with them all."

"It is a very stupid way," said Madame

de Maulévrier. "But you don't convince me in the least. When Gérard left home a fortnight ago he was in love with somebody. He can hardly have forgotten her yet."

"He has, if she existed a thousand times over," said Victor. "When a man leads a hermit life, like our excellent Gérard, and then goes out into the world, he is certain to lose his heart over and over again. It has been a struggle all this time between his duty to Mademoiselle de Brye—she attracts him too, I can tell you—and his admiration of Mademoiselle Mowbray."

Victor thought it was only prudent to say this, to prepare his mother for what he himself thought probable—Gérard's complete enslaving by the blue-eyed English girl. Madame de Maulévrier smiled rather scornfully.

"Gérard is not quite so weak as you suppose," she said. "*Now*, there can be no struggle; he is engaged. And is it only the hermits who lose their hearts, my poor Victor?"

"We in the crowd are more prudent," said Victor. "Besides most of us are poor fellows whose hearts nobody cares for."

This, too, was lost on his mother.

"Come with me to Gérard's room," she said, "and I will show you what I meant. Only never tell him you have seen it. Do you understand?"

Victor got up; but he stood still, and looked at his mother.

"If you will pardon me," he said, "I would rather not see it. I am sure Gérard has neither done nor thought anything that need grieve you."

Madame de Maulévrier stared, flushing

faintly. Victor saw that she was thinking of him at last; but she said nothing. Perhaps she was angry; but he thought not.

"You know Gérard, ma mére, and so do I," he went on. "We have the same opinion of him. Now, if you will allow me, I am going out for a little walk."

She stood passively, and let him kiss her hand.

"Very well, mon fils," she said, after a moment. "You will be here to receive them."

"Certainly," said Victor; and he strolled away somewhat thoughtfully into the park with his cigar.

CHAPTER XII.

A LEGITIMIST HOUSE.

THE shadows were lengthening as Gérard and his friends drove through the village street. The vivid depth and clearness of the light gave a strange intense reality to everything—a look that in misty England one reads of and imagines, but never sees. People lifted up their worn intelligent faces as the carriage passed, some looking grave and weary, others smiling. The broadest smiles were on the face of a fat old woman who was stocking her kitchen with brown loaves a yard long, which a moustached baker in a blouse was unloading from his cart at her door. A little

farther on, the Curé was standing at his gate. Gérard's face brightened as he saw his old friend, every line of whose face was full of welcome.

"It is my dear old tutor," he explained to his companions; and then a minute later they turned out of the street into the avenue of limes.

"Here you are at my home, mademoiselle," said Gérard, bending forward to Pauline, with a look and smile that reminded her of their talk in the street that day.

She was obliged to respond; she smiled too, a little glad that her father's exclamations on the splendid old trees saved her the trouble of speaking.

A few minutes more, and they were at the château that she had been thinking and dreaming about all these days. It was, indeed, a wild old place to English

eyes, deserted, neglected, over-grown with moss and weeds. Poor Mrs. Mowbray, who was not romantic, and liked civilisation, looked round with a slight shiver as she got out of the carriage.

The great rusty gates were open, and Madame de Maulévrier was standing with her son Victor on the steps. Gérard sprang out, kissed his mother, and presented his friends, to whom she made low curtsies. The stateliness of her manner struck them at once; it was quite distinct from Madame de Brye's stiffness. The little Marquise, with her pale straight face, was dressed in a plain gown of some thin stuff, and a round black straw hat. There was something very impressive about her; she gave one the idea of perfect sincerity. The few words she said were cordial, and she evidently meant them. Pauline felt at once that she

admired Madame de Maulévrier very much, far more than any French lady she had seen. Mr. Mowbray was at home with her at once. His wife could not quite make up her mind. As they went into the hall, Gérard turned to Pauline again with his half-wistful look.

"You are very welcome to Maulévrier," he said. "If the world was a different place, one might be happy."

"One *is* happy," Pauline answered; and then she saw that Madame de Maulévrier's eyes were fixed upon her.

"You like France, mademoiselle?" she said, in a voice which was musical enough, though it had a harsh note in it sometimes.

"Yes, madame," Pauline answered, quietly.

Then another inhabitant of Maulévrier —a great rough sad-faced deerhound—

after caressing his master, came and poked his long nose under her hand. She lingered a moment in the hall, talking to him, while he gazed up into her face, and Gérard stood looking on.

The great hall was paved with stone; a stone staircase, broad and easy, with heavy iron balusters, went up on one side; opposite was a high open door leading into another hall. That was the garden side of the house. The long windows there were open on the garden terrace, and looked out upon trees bathed in sunlight. The light shone through the house from end to end, giving it a noble cheerfulness. The old uneven painted walls were hung with pictures, chiefly portraits of old Maulévriers. There were a few old chairs and tables in these halls, a great inlaid cabinet, a stand of arms, and an immense stuffed wolf grinning horribly

in a corner. Not much look of comfort; but still Pauline, as she stood there with her hand on the dog's head, knew that she loved Maulévrier, and could have lived and died there, if Fate had chosen to arrange it so. She also understood that little French girl's shrinking from a place like this. It had such a strong character of its own that the people who lived there must absolutely adapt themselves to it. It must be loved or hated with all one's heart, like a stern human being. One might be in entire harmony with it, or in hopeless discord; and the last need not be altogether one's own fault.

They went into the inner hall, and through an anteroom into the large salon, which looked out on the garden side of the house. These rooms seemed bare and cold. The walls and ceiling were

carved and painted gray, with running wreaths of flowers in pale colours. The great chimneypiece was carved and blazoned with coats-of-arms. The chairs were chiefly white and gold, their cushions of faded brocade; but there was a mixture of large tapestried fauteuils, and one or two still more cumbersome, covered with old yellow satin. The floor looked like a sheet of ice. As to books, they were only represented by a few pamphlets and newspapers lying on a small table. On the narrow shelf of the chimneypiece there were three photographs in velvet frames—Henri Cinq, Don Carlos, and Princess Marguerite. The whole thing was a contrast to Madame de Brye's drawing-room, so full of comfort and pretty things; but it gave one the idea of a family holding fast, in poverty and misfortune, to its old traditions, refusing

to believe that the world had changed and left all those things behind.

It was hopelessly sad, and yet there was a strange beauty about it. Pauline began to understand why the Marquis de Maulévrier should have grown up melancholy.

The whole house had the same effect of last-century greatness, swept out by revolutions. The long unfurnished corridors, paved with red tiles; the bedrooms, with their old furniture of various styles, and hangings of patched tapestry; and then, through the windows, that glorious wooded view in the glow of evening—Mr. Mowbray told his wife he had never been in such an inspiring place. He was almost wild with delight. Mrs. Mowbray thought it all very strange and interesting, and confessed that she liked Madame de Maulévrier.

"But always remember you are in France, darling," she said to Pauline, who had come into her room before going down to dinner, and was standing rather dreamily at the window.

"Am I likely to forget it, mother?" she said, turning round. "We could not well be farther from England. Didn't it give you a sort of thrill to hear Madame de Maulévrier talk so naturally of 'our king'? One seemed to have gone back suddenly a hundred years."

"Yes, poor things!" said Mrs. Mowbray. "I think it is almost a pity to waste so much good feeling. There, don't argue with me. You are a furious Royalist now, of course. But when I said you must remember you are in France, I was not thinking of politics. About them I rather agree with M. de Brye's dog. I am afraid it will be dull

for you, with no one to speak to but Madame de Maulévrier and me. French girls do lead very stupid lives, no doubt. You must never go out without me, you know, Pauline."

"Not with papa?" said Pauline.

"Well, not on any of these wild expeditions that M. de Maulévrier was talking about. I think you ought to stay with me as much as possible, dearest child."

"M. de Maulévrier won't ask me to go, if he thinks I ought not."

"We will always consult his mother, at any rate," said Mrs. Mowbray.

Pauline was a little vexed; she thought her father was always chaperon enough, no matter how many young Frenchmen might be of the party. The Comte had never shown her anything but the barest politeness, and as to the Marquis, he was himself—her friend, as

she called him silently. Nothing could alter the truth that they understood each other, he and she.

"And why not?" Pauline asked herself, in a fierce young impatience of she hardly knew what, of the world's opinion and suspicions. "Have two people like us never been friends before?"

Mr. Mowbray had already gone downstairs; his wife was not quite ready, but Gérard had warned them of his mother's passion for punctuality, so Mrs. Mowbray told Pauline to go on, and she would follow her directly. Pauline walked down the red arched corridor slowly, in her white gown. She felt sad and uneasy, with all her fine theories of friendship. Half-way down she turned into the deep recess of a large window, to look at one or two portraits which were hanging there, especially one, small

and faded, of a young man with dark eyes, in an old-fashioned uniform. It was easy to see that Gérard was not a new type in his family. A quick step on the tiles startled her; she turned round, and saw him coming along the passage. He stood still and looked at her, smiling.

"It makes me very happy to see you standing there, mademoiselle!"

"I am afraid I am curious," said Pauline, "but I am so fond of pictures —and I could not help stopping to look at these. I suppose that is a relation of yours?"

"Yes, and a namesake. That poor fellow lived here in the time of the Revolution. Our misfortunes began with him, and have gone on ever since. It is a pity we don't banish the name."

"But you are not so unfortunate as

some people. You have your old place still—and how very beautiful it is!" said Pauline.

"Poor old place!" said Gérard. "It is beautiful at this moment, certainly. I have so much to show you, and that dear Monsieur Mowbray. How happy you are, mademoiselle, to have such a charming father!"

"Yes, papa is everything that is dear and good," said Pauline.

"And Madame Mowbray too! I look on with envy, and feel myself outside in the cold. I have no friends like that, except my old tutor. I must introduce him to you. And, mademoiselle, may I ask you to forgive me one thing?"

"I do not know what it can be, monsieur," said Pauline.

This was an odd way of talking, but how could he be expected to talk like a

commonplace man? thought this friend of the Marquis.

"Forgive me if I speak to you as an Englishman would."

"O, certainly."

"You don't misunderstand me? You know how it is with us? Our young girls are kept under lock and key by their good mothers, and one cannot have any talk with them but the smallest, do you see? But I knew at once, when I saw you, how you had been brought up: you are to me like Dante's Beatrice—I could not talk in that small way to you. I cannot look at you without wishing to tell you all my thoughts—not that they are worth your knowing."

Pauline listened, and thanked the kind angel who had advised Mademoiselle de Brye to confide in her. What silly

things she might have fancied from such a speech as this! As it was, thank heaven, she perfectly understood Gérard. He was a poet, and unhappy; she might do him some good, and most certainly he was welcome to all her sympathy. But she could not let him overrate her so much.

"I do assure you," she said, "that I am not the least like Beatrice or any one so great. I am not at all clever, and know very little of the world. When you talk to me, you will find me much stupider than you think. Papa knows it. I am not the least original, unfortunately."

"Gérard! Not dressed yet!" cried a voice from the other end of the corridor.

"In a moment, mother," Gérard answered, with life and cheerfulness in his voice.

He did not speak again to Pauline, but left her with an eager look of gratitude, and something more than admiration. She felt strangely lifted up, as if she was going through some high and new experience. Gérard's enthusiasm found only too ready a response. Something, half pleasure, half pain so deep that she hardly dared to realise it, was burning in her cheeks and shining in her deep blue eyes as she walked down the corridor. There, at the top of the stairs, she met Madame de Maulévrier, who had watched the English girl coming towards her, tall and graceful in her white dress, and had repeated to herself that this young woman was both beautiful and good. The Marquis had a very clear judgment of people, and an undoubted confidence in it. She waited for Pauline at the top

of the stairs, asked whether her mother was tired after the long drive, and then took her hand to lead her downstairs. When they reached the salon, Pauline almost thought that Gérard's stern little mother had something of his nameless charm.

To the three English guests, this old-fashioned household, with its simple ways, was an immense relief from the Maison Brye. People there thought themselves so much more agreeable, and were so much more tiresome. Here the dinner was almost brilliant. Madame de Maulévrier evidently liked the strangers. She and Mr. Mowbray had a great deal to say to each other, while Pauline and her mother found themselves laughing and talking with the two young men. Gérard that evening, in the character of host, looked

wonderfully handsome, and was quite a sociable being. Victor also did his best. Pauline thought the dining-room beautiful; its walls and ceiling were dark red, with remains of painting, and, in the revived old fashion, china plates were hung round in groups. Gérard had done that himself one day, he told them.

Late that night, when the dream-like evening was over, Pauline opened her shutters and leaned out into the sea of moonlight. The wild hoot of an owl startled her, then another, and another, as they flew restlessly from tree to tree. The frogs down in the park joined in with their harsh chorus. It seemed a strange weird thing to hear such sounds at night, but at Maulévrier everything was strange. Pauline hid her hot cheeks in her hands as she leaned

over her iron bar. Would she ever bitterly repent having come here at all? Would it not have been better to have no interests but at home in England, to walk quietly in the paths that good friends had marked out for her?

"No, no, this is better!" the foolish girl said to herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MORNING WALK.

MISS MOWBRAY called her nephew's wife a worldly woman, and to a certain extent she was right. Mrs. Mowbray had been brought up by parents who taught her to think the world's opinion everything, to be ambitious for herself and her family, and to care very much for all the world's good things, and a good deal for the money that buys them. Such an education must have its results; in this case they were less than might have been expected. She went against her theories at the very beginning of life, by returning George Mowbray's love and marrying him; a man of good family, it is true, but not rich, and never likely to

gain distinction of any sort. A woman could not live with him and be very worldly at the same time, unless she was hard and unloving, which was not at all the case with his wife. All his children too loved him so much, and were like him in their different ways. Mrs. Mowbray's worldly prudence could not work disagreeably in such an atmosphere as this, though she did plan and scheme for them all in her own mind, and sometimes felt as if she was living in a house full of children. Aunt Lucia, who was fond of talking about the disposal of her property, had hinted several times that she might possibly leave it to Pauline. The girl was her favourite in the family, partly because she liked pretty things, and partly because she believed that Pauline loved her. But she also made it understood that her intentions

depended very much on the marriage Pauline might make. Mrs. Mowbray kept all these hints to herself; she did not wish to raise a family storm. But Pauline heard something of the same kind from Aunt Lucia herself, and did not altogether dislike the idea of being her heiress, and providing generously for all her brothers and sisters.

Since they had been in France, and especially at Maulévrier, new possibilities had been crowding into Mrs. Mowbray's mind. It was all very well for George to laugh; but she believed that Frenchmen were human beings, and sometimes did marry for love. Pauline's absorbing interest in the young Marquis was not any plainer than his admiration for her. Mrs. Mowbray hardly knew what to think of it, and could not feel her husband's calm security.

Pauline found that days at Maulévrier had a way of flying; some people might have said it was because of their monotony. As a rule, nobody in the house saw the Marquise before eleven o'clock. She was up at six, went to mass, and then visited her hospital, her poor people in the village, and her farm buildings. Mr. Mowbray used to knock at Pauline's door about half-past eight, and he and she generally went off for a walk, which was delightful in the summer morning. Now and then it happened that Gérard joined them or met them in the park on their return. Punctually at eleven the breakfast bell rang, and Madame de Maulévrier waited for nobody. After breakfast the ladies sat and worked in the salon for an hour or two, during which time the post generally came, and there were letters and newspapers to be read. The gentle-

men were supposed to spend their time in the salon, but Victor escaped as soon as possible to his cigar. Mr. Mowbray talked and entertained his hostess as she sat working diligently. Gérard lounged about, or sometimes brought in great books of prints from the library, and showed them to Pauline on a table in the farthest window.

Between one and two, no matter how hot it was, the hardy Marquise put on a shady hat and went out to walk about her farm. Mr. Mowbray loyally followed her. Mrs. Mowbray went to her own room to write letters. Pauline sometimes joined her father and the Marquise, but oftener her mother. Gérard used to stand lingering in the hall, and look after her as she walked slowly upstairs, but she did not dare to answer those wistful looks by staying in the salon.

Later in the afternoon they often went out for a drive; sometimes only the ladies and Mr. Mowbray. Or, if he stayed at home fascinated by some new discovery in the library, one of the young men would take his place in the carriage.

Dinner was at half-past six. After that they often strolled about in the park and garden, or sat on the terrace. When it was dark they went into the high gloomy salon again, where the Marquise once more sat down to her knitting or needlework. But the pleasantest evenings were those when she gave herself and her guests her one amusement—music. Sometimes she would play Mozart, or Beethoven, or more old-fashioned music still; sometimes she would accompany Gérard while he sang. Pauline used to like to sit where she could watch them at the piano; his dark

gentle face leaning over close to his mother's shoulder, while she smiled with a happy sweetness that only his songs could bring to life in her face.

The very calm of these days made them more dangerous; there was no excitement in them, only a charm that went on deepening.

One day, when Pauline and her father were starting for their usual morning walk, Gérard overtook them in the avenue, and carried them off by a short cut into green woodland paths, where long grass grew under the tall trees, and they had to step carefully and think of possible vipers. Then they descended into a lane full of stones, between high banks, where fern and wild flowers grew. Mr. Mowbray, who knew a little of botany as well as of everything else, was delighted to find some rare orchids among

these flowers. Gérard climbed up the bank, ready and eager to help him.

"Well done, my friend," said Mr. Mowbray. "You are as active as an Englishman."

"I must take that as a compliment from you, monsieur," said Gérard, resignedly. After a moment he went on: "I suppose our life strikes you—mademoiselle and yourself—as very different from anything English. But what is this great difference?"

"Come to England and we will show you," said Mr. Mowbray.

"Ah, I wish I could think that was possible! But I hope you are a little prejudiced; and yet you are right; this sort of life is miserable."

"To me it seems charming," said Pauline.

"You make it charming; but let me

complain for two minutes. I want you and Mr. Mowbray to confess that I am an unfortunate fellow. Will you listen?"

"Growl away; not a bad plan for getting rid of the cobwebs," said Pauline's father.

She herself only smiled her answer. Gérard was encouraged, and plunged into a list of his grievances. He certainly was in a complaining mood that morning. His sorrows were many, from being his mother's eldest son, and being kept always at home while his brothers went to college and had their profession, to the terrible injury of not having been allowed to fight the Germans, to the life he led now—a mere useless dilettante, while other men were doing their work—to the poverty which crippled him, and led to what he described as "endless complications."

Pauline felt as if she could have said a great deal to him in answer to all this. She would have preached a more effective sermon than Mr. Mowbray, who was advising the young man to set himself some definite work—to write a book, to cut down trees, to dig in the garden.

"Long fellows like you are always lazy," said Mr. Mowbray; "I was just as bad myself before I married. By the bye, you will probably marry one of these days, and that will give you something to think about. Or perhaps your mother will prefer your not marrying. It might make the complications worse, certainly."

Gérard made no answer. He was flushed; but the sun was high by this time, and he was not much used to walking. Pauline was glad that just

then they reached the end of the stony lane, and turned into a more frequented road. Opposite them, a wild unkept avenue of dark firs led up to a pair of high gates between pillars covered with ivy.

"What has brought us here?" said Gérard, stopping suddenly. "I did not mean to come so far."

"So much the better; the walk will do us all good," said Mr. Mowbray. "What is this place? It looks rather dismal."

"I meant to show it to you one day; but it is too far for mademoiselle. However, as we are here, it is Monsieur de Brye's house, the Maison Blanche."

At the name Pauline could not help shivering; it seemed as if something more than chance had brought them here.

Mr. Mowbray was much interested in the Maison Blanche, and did not notice that his companions became rather silent as they walked up the avenue. A dog barked furiously when the gate was opened; an old woman popped her head out at a window, but seeing M. de Maulévrier, nodded and drew it in again.

On each side of the court, opposite each other, there were two long low white houses. In the middle there was a plantation of young firs, and at the end facing the gate some rough steps led up into a green raised place, also planted with firs, and fenced in with the remains of old blackened walls, half-covered now with ivy. This was the site of the château that had been set alight by its master in the Revolution.

They wandered round the old defences, and Gérard told them what a grand

house it had been. In Louis XV.'s time, the Comte de Brye had pulled down his feudal castle, and had made a splendid building of white stone. Everyone in the country called it the Maison Blanche, and this name had gradually come to belong to it, lingering on after those white walls had crumbled down, and the inlaid floors and painted ceilings had blazed, and the family, finding their way back at last to the old place, had established themselves and their servants in the two half-ruined pavilions on each side of the great court. It was sad to walk about under the sighing firs, among the brambles that now grew tangling round those blocks of fireworn stone. Mr. Mowbray was eager to make out the plan of the building. He went clambering down by what was once the lower

story of a turret, leaving the two young people standing above in the shade.

"I don't think I should like to live here," said Pauline. "There must be ghosts."

"Certainly. There is a lady who shot her husband because he would not let her have her own way. She wanders about here in the winter nights, and cries very sadly. Then an old Seigneur de Brye has his hunting-meet in the court there. He and his men and dogs go hunting all round the country. On certain nights they pass through the park at Maulévrier. Many of our peasants have heard the wild notes of the horn, the gallop of the horses, and the baying of the dogs. You believe me, mademoiselle?"

"One learns to believe anything in a country like this," said Pauline.

"Ah, yes! we have some mystery left to us. You in England have everything explained and proved scientifically, even to your religion itself. You have no dreams, no superstitions. You are a sensible people, without any romance. Well, perhaps you are all the happier for it."

"I don't know. I don't think we are all so very sensible," said Pauline, looking up at him and smiling. "In some things, surely, you are more matter of fact than we are."

These young people were fond of talking about the differences between their nations, and certainly managed to find a good deal of harmony in the contrast. Gérard argued eagerly, but with an evident wish to be contradicted. Pauline, much as she admired France, stood up stoutly for her own country. When she thought of Mademoiselle de

Brye, on whose ground they were standing, it was with a real thrill of pity. Certainly England had the best of it there. An Englishman—if he was worth anything, at least—having engaged himself to one girl, would hardly find this perfect satisfaction in the society of another.

A strange man, whom it was hard to meet on his own ground, the thin ice of a poet's friendship! To forget and efface oneself, to be natural and brave —that was the only way to walk in safety.

Pauline tried honestly for this, and on the whole succeeded very well. As long as she was with Gérard, there was no difficulty; only when she was alone, the girl's heart rebelled and revenged itself a little. But after all, the pleasure was worth the pain.

When Mr. Mowbray came back from

his researches, and saw them standing together in the shade of the fir-trees, Pauline smiling, Gérard talking in a low voice, completely engrossed in her and her smiles, an instant's self-reproach crossed his happy irresponsible mind. Mrs. Mowbray had given him such lectures, such warnings, about taking care of Pauline in this strange land, and now he had gone away and left her for at least ten minutes tête-à-tête with a young Frenchman. But he soon reassured himself. He knew the world, as he had often told his wife, better than she did; he stuck to his opinion that any entanglement with Gérard was impossible. This Frenchman, he felt sure, was like other Frenchmen, only even more dutiful than most of them, and therefore even more likely to make his mother's choice his own. And as to

Madame de Maulévrier, whatever compliments she might pay to Pauline's mother, was it within the bounds of possibility that she should offer her son, the head of the house, to a girl of a different nation and a despised religion? No, the idea was absurd, and only worthy of an Englishwoman.

"Of course the fellow admires her—tremendously—but as a picture, and an intelligent girl to talk to," thought Mr. Mowbray, as he came up to them. "Well," he asked, "what have you been talking about?"

"M. de Maulévrier has been telling me ghost-stories," Pauline answered, serenely.

"They are all thrown away. Mademoiselle Mowbray does not believe in ghosts," said Gérard.

Pauline could not remember that she had told him so.

CHAPTER XIV.

DREAMS.

PAULINE had every chance of dreaming her dream out, at least as far as the château and its mistress were concerned.

There was a curious old town twenty miles off, in the opposite direction to Tourlyon, noted for its early fortifications, and other things which interested antiquaries. Mr. Mowbray and Gérard made a plan for spending a few days at this town, to explore it and the country round it, while the ladies stayed at Maulévrier. Mr. Mowbray was bold enough to suggest taking Pauline with him, but his wife would not listen to this for a moment.

She was capable of looking at all sides of a thing, and she neither wished to scandalise Madame de Maulévrier, nor to throw Pauline too much in Gérard's way. Mrs. Mowbray was not too sure of her own wishes, or of what would be good for her child. So Pauline was left with the elder ladies, and a very quiet little party they were. Victor also was away; he had gone back for a few days to Tourlyon, to be present at some fête given by Léon's regiment. Mrs. Mowbray and Pauline were not sorry when he went: they did not care for his formal manners and cool cynical air.

The clockwork existence went on with more monotony than ever, only broken by one or two visits from the Curé, and these were not entertaining. He and the Marquise were hindered by politeness from talking of their usual subjects—family

affairs and the Church: but besides this, the Curé did not like English people, and disapproved of Gérard's fancy for these particular ones. He was not to be won by the girl's beauty or her mother's pleasant looks; he was grave and distant, watching the intruders with a little suspicious fear.

Mrs. Mowbray, who had many anxieties, and wanted amusing, and was getting tired of this household and its stiff ways, thought perhaps the Curé's visits were better than nothing: but Pauline preferred the days when he did not come.

In the long, still, sunny hours she wandered about the precincts of the château, sometimes exchanging a smile and a few words with the servants or work-people who crossed her path, and to all of whom she was an object of deep interest, but oftener quite alone and silent

through those sweet, sad, endless days. Madame de Maulévrier had lent her the "Life of the saintly Duchesse de Doudeauville." She would go out with the book in her hand, and presently sit down in some corner of the garden and read half a page; but then her eyes would be lifted, and the open book would lie neglected on her knee, and she would sit gazing at the old towering château with its sharp lights and shadows and rugged roofs breaking the blue sky, thinking,

> "Ah, thinking? nay,
> But rather dreaming all thought away."

When Pauline was not in the garden, she had a favourite place indoors, where she found that in Gérard's absence nobody ever disturbed her. It was a large old sofa in the recess of a window, at the far end of the library. Not that the books were much attraction to Pauline; but she

had often found her father here with Gérard talking to him, showing him books, or arguing on some pet subject. The corner seemed haunted by clever expressive faces and friendly voices. Pauline as she sat there alone could almost see the tall slight figure standing in the window, the mouth and eyes smiling as he talked to her father, too often looking at her all the time.

But this window had other attractions of its own: a pretty homelike view with some life in it. No stern courtyards and gates, clipped alleys and formal terraces, which even a person in love with the château might find wearisome in time; but looking out from this commanding point over softly clustering tree-tops, millions of tender lime-leaves and blossoms just coming out, over which the wind passed with a gentle rustle, taking and

scattering their delicate scent; then down into the lower part of the park, where a few cows were feeding, where the rush-bordered ponds, home of the troublesome ducks, reflected every tint of the sky, and not far beyond the thatched gable of a farmhouse peeped out from its shelter of trees. Jacques and Marie Mingot, with their little girl in her round cap, might often be seen trudging past the ponds on their way to château or village. It was like a glimpse of the outside world to see them going about their business, and perhaps coming back laden with a long loaf from La Baleine, the fat woman who lived near the church.

One day at breakfast Madame de Maulévrier expressed a wish to show Mrs. Mowbray a cow she had just bought. Mrs. Mowbray, whose practical knowledge included a few ideas about cows, was of

course delighted. They went into the salon, still talking about cows, and all three sat down to their needlework. Pauline agreed with the young men in thinking this the most tiresome hour of the day, and was always glad when the post came, which it did to-day a good deal later than usual. One o'clock was past when Michel brought in the letters. Mrs. Mowbray had two, one from her husband, which she read smiling and gave at once to Pauline. Mr. Mowbray wrote in brilliant spirits; he had seen a great deal that interested him deeply, and had been introduced to some most charming people. "I suppose you and Polly would not object to another invitation," he wrote, "especially if it is to meet a prince. Our friend M. de M. will settle all that, however."

The Marquis, meanwhile, was reading

a letter from Gérard, with a clouded brow and one or two exclamations. "What nonsense! what impossibility! I, who have not left home for years!" But when she had done she looked across at Pauline with a sudden smile.

"Voyons!" she said, tapping the letter with her finger. "My old friend M. de Coigny is to be honoured with a visit from the Prince of Catalonia. Gérard tells me we shall be asked to meet his Royal Highness, and our English guests too. M. de Coigny has been introduced to Monsieur Mowbray, and is as much struck as other people have been—pardon, madame. There will be a large party; it may amuse mademoiselle; as to myself, I never leave home now."

She looked questioningly at Mrs. Mowbray, who till she spoke had been busy with her own letter, an English one,

long and crossed: something in it worried her a little, as Pauline saw it at once. Neither of them responded very brightly to Madame de Maulévrier's announcement. Mrs. Mowbray thanked her cordially, but said that in her opinion it was quite time for them to be going on their way. Of course, however, she must consult her husband before giving a positive answer. No doubt this would be a wonderful new experience for Pauline. "I have had almost too many new experiences," thought the poor girl, but she only smiled rather faintly.

"Of course, madame, she would find herself in fairyland, and learn a little history too," said the Marquis. "I would not take every young girl to the Château de Boiscarré, they are almost too old fashioned; but a young girl of Mademoiselle Pauline's discretion, that is quite

another thing. In the meanwhile shall we visit my cow?"

Mrs. Mowbray was quite ready. Being a moment alone with Pauline, she gave her the English letter.

"From Aunt Lucia," she said. "Read it carefully; I think you will agree with me that we ought to go home at once. Don't come out, the sun is too hot for you. Where shall I find you when we come in?"

"In the library; it is so cool there. Mother, is there anything wrong at home?"

"Nobody is ill. I don't quite know what to make of it—you will see. I think we ought to go home."

"So do I!" said Pauline, with a sigh.

Her mother gave her a quick glance, but had not time to speak, for Madame

de Maulévrier came back with her hat on.

Pauline escaped to her sofa in the library-window, and read Aunt Lucia's letter, crouched in one of its soft old leather corners. It was, as usual, a pleasant disjointed letter, full of scraps of information about her garden, her people, that tiresome parson who was always wanting to go back to the north. With his usual pigheadedness, he would not listen civilly to Mrs. Mowbray's delightful accounts of French life; so Aunt Lucia was obliged to enjoy them alone.

"You are all asleep and dreaming, I can see," she said. "You must wake some day; and, by the bye, Ben was asking me yesterday whether George had any shares in the West Mercian Bank. He says some rumour is making people

sell their shares. He says these rumours are wicked, and talks about rats and sinking ships; but this is his usual nonsense, and I don't see, as I told him, why the poor rats should be drowned. I know he would like better to be ruined with a dozen others than saved by himself; but if he had a parcel of boys and girls I hope he would think differently. I believe George has some shares in the West Mercian. Tell him, with my love, that he had better come home and attend to business. He must tear himself away from his dear French people, and the sooner the better. Ben thinks so too, in spite of his talk, or why did he mention the rumour to me?"

Pauline's ideas of money and business were even more shadowy and unpractical than her father's. Her head was full of

other things, too; and if her conscience had been at rest in enjoying Maulévrier, Aunt Lucia's letter would have made very little impression. What were bank shares? The girl hardly knew. Her mother managed these things, with the advice of the London uncle, who was supposed to be a clever business man. Even he, however, had something of the Mowbray flightiness, and had lost money more than once by his speculations. Pauline had no doubt that her mother was right, that they would have to go home, and to refuse this wonderful invitation of Monsieur de Coigny's. She was obliged to confess, for herself, that it was the best thing to do. These days of quiet thought had shown her that she was weaker than she fancied. It was terrible to find oneself so taken up with a man who was engaged, and not

in ignorance either. Besides the risk to herself, it was almost treason to Françoise de Brye. Not quite—no, not quite; for Pauline assured herself that Gérard meant nothing. She could not blame him, because her soul was so much smaller than he thought, because she was troubled with a consciousness to which he was so entirely a stranger.

When Mrs. Mowbray came back from her walk, Aunt Lucia's letter was on the floor, and Pauline, resting her cheek on her hand, was gazing out of the window. She moved and turned to her mother, thus bringing her face more into shadow; but Mrs. Mowbray thought there was a tear on her eyelashes. She had just been gratified by a few sincere compliments which the Marquise had bestowed on Pauline. Madame de Maulévrier had spoken almost as if she would

like to keep Pauline with her when her parents went back to England. That would not do, of course—and she had not exactly said it; but the mere hint of such a thing was strangely complimentary.

Mrs. Mowbray did not really believe that this bank was in any danger, she told Pauline, as she sat down beside her on the sofa, and picked up the letter to look at it again. Still it was always best to be prudent, and Aunt Lucia was no doubt right in advising them to come back and look after their affairs.

"But you know," said Mrs. Mowbray, "if anything has been seriously wrong, your uncle would have written. I sent him our address the other day. He knows much more about these things than Aunt Lucia, or Ben Dunstan either. But

I believe we ought to go home; only I don't like to disappoint you. Of course, we can do nothing till your father comes; and he may have set his heart on going to this château and meeting this prince—who doesn't interest me at all, by the bye."

"Nor me," said Pauline, wearily. "Yes, let us go home. I long to see them all again—don't you?"

"But you are happy here, darling?" said Mrs. Mowbray.

At this moment she was far more anxious about Pauline's future than about that of the West Mercian Bank, important as it might be to them all.

"O, yes. But it is what Aunt Lucia says—I am asleep and dreaming. Dreams get uncomfortable sometimes; they are too much," said Pauline, putting her hand to her head; "and one is glad to

see the humdrum old daylight—can't you understand?"

"Madame de Maulévrier is a remarkable person," said Mrs. Mowbray, not answering this. "Are you fond of her?"

"I don't know; rather—not exactly."

"I think she likes you very much, in her way. I was quite amused by the things she said to me just now—about missing you, and liking to look at you and hear your voice. She almost hinted she would like you to stay on, if we went to England."

"I couldn't do that! O, mother, I hope you didn't say I would!" exclaimed the girl, flushing crimson, seizing her mother's arm.

"There was no accepting or refusing in the case," said Mrs. Mowbray, quietly. "I should not accept, however, for I

think our child had better stay with us till she leaves us in the orthodox way."

"I don't want ever to leave you at all," murmured Pauline.

"You need not say that. It is only natural that you should find some places and people very attractive. And I can see when my Pauline is appreciated."

Pauline submitted quietly to her mother's embrace. She now only regretted that she had not been brave enough to trust her mother long ago.

"There is something you don't know of, mother," she said, after a minute. "I wish Madame de Maulévrier had told you."

These were such different words from any Mrs. Mowbray had expected that for the moment she was startled. What could the girl mean? She held her hands, and looked at her with eager anxiety.

"Something that I don't know! Something about you?" she asked, hurriedly.

"Oh, no, not about me," said Pauline; and her smile was comforting, though Mrs. Mowbray was more puzzled than ever.

"Don't be so mysterious, child, for Heaven's sake!" she exclaimed.

"Do you remember our last evening at Tourlyon—at Madame de Brye's? Did you notice that Mademoiselle de Brye was talking to me for a long time? Well, she told me something about herself, poor little thing. I was not to tell any one but you, and I didn't even tell you—I wish I had. She is engaged to Monsieur de Maulévrier, mother—at least, their parents have arranged it, but I think it is not finally settled yet. It is to be, though. Mother, do you understand? You must not tell any one—they don't wish it known at present."

Mrs. Mowbray sat staring before her: the news had indeed astonished her; at first she could hardly take in all its bearings. George was right; these French arrangments were extraordinary, inscrutable. She must acknowledge that he knew the ways of this nation, and she did not. Wonderful, that a few miles of sea should make such a division.

"Why, he doesn't care a straw for her—not a straw," she said presently, thinking aloud.

"Perhaps he does, after all—at any rate, he will be good to her," said Pauline, very low.

"Well," said her mother, "I think he should be a little more careful in his manner to other young ladies."

Pauline looked up and smiled, bravely.

"To speak quite truly," she said, "I am glad we are going away; but it has

not been *his* fault. I knew all the time and understood—"

"What certainly was difficult to understand," Mrs. Mowbray added. "But I am too thankful that the girl told you."

She looked long into her child's sweet face, with loving, questioning anxious eyes. Was the dear heart gone—stolen, even unconsciously, by this dreadful sentimental Frenchman?

"You are not unhappy?" she whispered.

"No, my darling," answered Pauline, laying her head on her mother's shoulder. "I'm only a little foolish, and very much ashamed. I should have got over it without saying anything, perhaps, only I couldn't let you think— Now that you know everything, I am much happier; and when we are once back in England, I shall be as happy as a queen."

Mrs. Mowbray was wise enough to take this assurance, and to press for nothing more.

"And that poor girl," she said, "is she contented? What made her tell you?"

"I don't know. She hates this place, and thinks the whole thing dreadfully dismal; but she hopes he won't be difficult to live with."

"How extremely shocking!"

"His brothers are to give up their share, somehow, so that he may be able to marry. This estate and Monsieur de Brye's run into each other, so it all suits very well."

"Then his brothers can't marry! I have heard of such arrangements, but I always thought they belonged to the bad old times before the Revolution," said Mrs. Mowbray. "Poor Monsieur Gérard! Not that I ought to pity him; but they

all want pity, it seems to me. Yes, my dear, I agree with you. I should like to wake from this uncomfortable dream, and find myself back in England. Banks may break, but we don't sell our children—not often, at least."

CHAPTER XV.

A WAKING.

PAULINE was not downstairs when Mr. Mowbray and Gérard came back, driving up to the door in the late afternoon, and waking all the noises of that old palace of sleep. She heard the dogs barking and the gates clanging, and went out of her room into the corridor, where she could look down from the great window, and see the arrival without herself been seen. Her mother and Madame de Maulévrier, were out on the steps receiving the travellers. She heard her father ask, "Where's Polly?" and then came the same question from Gérard, in a different form, and a lower, more anxious tone, "And Mademoiselle?"

Pauline reflected that a French girl would have been standing dutifully behind her mother, joining silently in the reception of her father and her host. She hoped she was not doing wrong by being away; for it was true that she had escaped on purpose, half dreading the meeting before her mother's eyes.

Fate had, indeed, treated her and Gérard with a cruel kindness. These days had been their first separation for more than a few hours since they met that evening in the doorway of the old hotel at Tourlyon. She could not help wondering whether Gérard, too, was aware of this. Probably not: why should he think of anything that mattered so little? Pauline scolded herself heartily, and went downstairs.

The staircase descended into the outer hall; to reach the salon where Madame

de Maulévrier generally sat, one had to go through the inner hall and the ante-room. When Pauline came downstairs, nothing was to be seen of Mr. Mowbray and the ladies, who no doubt had gone into the salon. The doors of the outer hall were open to the broad calm sunshine of the court; the great gates, too, were still standing open, and beyond them the lime avenue was a deep cavern of fragrant shade. Gérard, who was just crossing the hall with his dog, came forward, and met Pauline at the foot of the stairs.

"You are come back; have you brought papa?" she began, smiling, as he took the tips of her fingers and bowed over them in his ceremonious way.

Gérard did not answer instantly. He stood still and looked at her, and in his dark thoughtful eyes there was something quite new, something which Françoise de

Brye had certainly never seen, and which to Pauline, who had no right to it, was only sad and terrible. At first, however, unprepared, and suddenly fascinated, she could not help looking too—telling him, poor child, all that he told her—and that moment was long enough for an endless history of love and despair. Then Pauline was seized with the consciousness of what she was doing, of what Gérard was doing, of a reality more painful than anything she had feared or fancied. Her eyes fell, and she felt herself flushing and trembling, struggling all the time to be brave and cool, and to say something careless; but that was impossible. She looked up again, half thinking and almost hoping she must have been fool enough to deceive herself; but no, it was worse than ever now. Even Gérard's pale brown skin had flushed

scarlet; he was moving forward, he was going to speak; his eyes said that he had forgotten all obstacles, and was ready to defy any authority. Pauline felt that she must not stay a moment longer; she turned round and fled away upstairs.

Gérard stood where she had left him. He had hardly known what he was doing, or what that meeting again would be. And this discovery—why, it meant something very like madness. An honourable man! What had he done? What could he do now? He had shown this English angel a feeling which ought never to have existed, but which, in the sudden rapture of seeing her again, had grown to twice its former stature, and become, for the moment, uncontrollable. And she—she looked—Gérard hardly dared to think how she looked; and this added another pang to his self-reproach, for, of course,

she did not know that he was a traitor. He went out into the park with his dog, and stayed there till nearly dinner-time. Pauline found things to occupy her upstairs, and the elder ladies sat with Mr. Mowbray in the salon, listening to all his adventures and projects. Madame de Maulévrier was much pleased and interested. Mrs. Mowbray listened anxiously; she had more than one trouble in her mind, and there was nothing helpful in George's enthusiasms.

He had made up his mind to write a book on Legitimism, a subject on which the depth of English ignorance, he said, was incredible. Nobody wonld believe how often he met people who did not know the difference between Legitimists and Orleanists—educated people too, who had read history. Some had never heard of Henri Cinq at all; others confounded

his family, hopelessly, with that of his distant cousins. The Spanish branch, too, who knew anything about them? How many people were aware that Don Carlos was really King Charles VII. of Spain? Mr. Mowbray confessed that his own ideas on these subjects had been a little misty till within the last few days, when that most agreeable Monsieur de Coigny had taken the trouble to make everything clear to him. With this charming intelligent man he had talked over the plan of his book, which was not to be written in a partisan spirit—that could not be expected from an Englishman—but to be a simple statement of facts, a history of the past and present of the Legitimist cause.

"Come and see us next week," M. de Coigny had said; "we will introduce you to a prince worthy of the name;" and on this had followed the formal invitation

to meet his Royal Highness at the Château de Boiscarré.

"You don't really mean to go, George?" said Mrs. Mowbray, when they went up to dress for dinner.

"Indeed I do! Why shouldn't we go? The invitation is a great compliment—don't you know that? Besides, Maulévrier would be awfully disappointed; he is a real friend, that young fellow; he wishes us to see the best of everything in France. And if I am to write this book, which will sell like wildfire, could I have a better chance of collecting facts and impressions for it? You have been rather dismal lately, I suppose, and you are getting homesick. Polly has been bored with you two old ladies. Where on earth is Polly, by the bye? I haven't seen her yet."

"Never mind her now; she is very

well," said Mrs. Mowbray, as he turned towards the door. "I want to talk to you. I daresay this visit may be amusing and instructive, and all that. But I think we ought to go home."

"Why are you in such a hurry? Our time is not nearly up yet. We are going to Tours and Orleans and Chartres, and a dozen more places, before we go home. Isn't Madame de Maulévrier cordial? Do you think she is tired of us?"

"Not in the least; she is extremely kind, and I quite believe they would like us to pay this visit. But I have had a long letter from Aunt Lucia, which—"

"Hang Aunt Lucia! What does she want? I am not at her beck and call, neither is Polly, though she may alter her will a dozen times. What does she want now?"

"You talk like a schoolboy," said Mrs.

Mowbray. "I won't read the whole letter, but just listen to this;" and, in spite of his impatient growls, she read Aunt Lucia's warning about the bank. "I agree with her, George," she said. "I think we ought to go home."

But Mr. Mowbray was not impressed at all. He laughed the whole thing to scorn; it was nothing but an old maid's fancy; as to Ben Dunstan's opinion—why, the wish was father to the thought. Nothing gave these Radicals more pleasure than the downfall of some respectable institution like the West Mercian Bank.

"I know the fellow," said George Mowbray, who certainly seemed to have left his small supply of common sense behind him at Villemur. "He is a regular alarmist. Don't you suppose John would have written or telegraphed, if there had been a grain of truth in this?

If Ben Dunstan told Aunt Lucia that the Bank of England was going to stop payment, she would believe him. It is a dodge of Mr. Ben's to bring Polly back to England. He is like you—he thinks some Frenchman will fall in love with her, and that wouldn't suit him at all."

"Poor thing! I don't think it would make much difference in his prospects," said Mrs. Mowbray. "Well, I do agree with what you say about John. I thought of that myself."

"Of course. All our affairs are in John's hands. You feel better now, then? What will you be nervous about next, I wonder? This prince is a young fellow, I believe; perhaps he will fall in love with the lovely Polly."

"We must go to this château, then? Neither she nor I care about it at all."

"I told you we were going hours ago.

I am going, and I shall insist on taking you and Polly. I shall not leave you here again; you get thoroughly stagnated, and nervous and stupid, when you ought to be taking in all sorts of new ideas. You have had quite enough of moping here, and so has she, no doubt. She is quite well?" with sudden earnestness.

"Perfectly well," said Mrs. Mowbray. "Yes, I think she has been a little bored. Can you keep a secret? If you can I'll tell you a piece of news about our friend the Marquis."

"The most natural arrangement in the world, when one comes to think of it," he said, when she had told him. "Poor lad! Well, I have no doubt he is quite satisfied. Probably it was settled years ago. Rather a pity not to make it public—don't you think so? If Polly had not been the most discreet of girls,

she might easily have taken his politeness for more than it was worth. I've seen him look desperately sentimental; a silly girl would have been taken in."

"Mademoiselle de Brye guarded against that, you see," said Mrs. Mowbray, quietly.

"Clever girl! She knows her fiancé pretty well, that's clear. It was a deep thing to do, to confide in Polly. I am glad she thought of it."

"Be sure you keep the secret," said Mrs. Mowbray.

She saw that her husband was entirely set on their going to the Château de Boiscarré, and, like a sensible woman, she was now ready to make the best of it. Of course, bank or no bank, she would have been glad to take Pauline away from these people as soon as possible. The child was brave and good, but it was no use stretching these fine cords to their

tightest; still as it must be done, the mother determined that she and Pauline must from this time be inseparable. No more lingerings in the library-window, or morning rambles with her father and the Marquis; from this moment she must be like a French girl, never to be seen without her mother. And fortunately this companionship would be quite natural and easy, through the formal festivities of the Château de Boiscarré. Ah, Mrs. Mowbray, there is a common proverb about a stable-door, which we will not quite venture to apply to our dear Pauline; yet as an allegory it may be true of girls, as much as of any inferior part of creation.

That evening, watching her daughter and Gérard with a new alertness, Mrs. Mowbray saw that his manner at least was changed. The old melancholy weari-

ness, from which his English friends had roused him, had come upon him again; he was silent and moody, except when Mr. Mowbray appealed to him; then he seemed to make an effort to rouse himself, and enter heartily into the subject of the future book and its materials. But to the English ladies he behaved with a grave formality, keeping away from Pauline, scarcely looking at her, never addressing her, speaking to her mother with a sort of cautious politeness that struck her as something quite new and unpleasant. Of course Pauline too must notice this, and it might very well account for her extreme quietness and the deep interest with which she appeared to listen to her father's unflagging chatter.

"Why can't the idiot be natural?" thought Mrs. Mowbray, who felt unreasonably angry with Gérard. I believe

he thinks he has been going too far, and he is putting on these airs as a warning to us. It would have been better to be honest from the beginning. He need not be alarmed; sooner than Pauline should marry one of these heartless foreigners, I would—Aunt Lucia is perfectly right. I only wish George had not lost his senses. I wish that prince and that château were at the bottom of the sea!"

In this frame of mind Mrs. Mowbray made another attempt at persuading her husband to give up his romantic plans, and to go home without further delay. She talked about the bank, for she did not like to say much about Pauline, whose confidence was sacred even from her father.

But Mr. Mowbray, having talked all the evening about his book, could not see the smallest importance in any other subject. His book was to run through

many editions, and was to make his fame and his fortune; what madness to run away from the personal experience that would be the cream of it.

"We shall bring out another edition of the *Revolution Sketches*, with a good many touches added," said the author, in his new enthusiasm. "And then I might follow it up with a novel of French life, to run through one of the best magazines first, and pay like anything. Gérard de Maulévrier will do for the hero."

"A bad return for his hospitality, and a morbid, ridiculous hero," said Mrs. Mowbray, with some acrimony. "Do you know, George, you remind me of the man in the *Arabian Nights*—Schacabac, wasn't it? The man who sat making his grand plans—just as you sit now in that armchair—and with one kick smashed all his possessions."

"My dear, always verify your quotations. The man's name was Alnaschar. But I don't see the likeness."

"Very well, Alnaschar. I beg your pardon, it is just the same thing. You are so wrapped up in this book, and these Legitimists, and so on—I don't myself see why they should interest anybody, but that's another question—your head is so full of them that you can't attend to your English affairs. This bank may break, and we may find ourselves ruined, just because you are so buried in these things as not to realise the danger."

"Why, if I was thinking of the bank from morning till night it might break all the same."

"Don't be so stupid, so provoking!" cried poor Mrs. Mowbray. "George, do be serious for one moment. At your age such folly is inconceivable."

"There are different kinds of folly. I wonder when you will outgrow your nervousness," retorted her husband, with perfect good-humour. "However, there is something in what you say, and I'll tell you what you can do. I don't believe a syllable of these rumours, you know; but one may as well be on the safe side. Write to John; tell him our plans, and how Aunt Lucia has frightened you; and ask him to take steps for selling out, if he thinks there is the smallest reason. That will make your mind easy, I suppose. Of course, if he advises it, we can go straight home after Boiscarré; but I won't miss that for all the banks in Christendom."

Mrs. Mowbray was pacified, and the letter was written. But it happened that Mr. John Mowbray had been called out of town to an arbitration case in

Scotland, and the letter, not being manifestly important or business-like, lay waiting for several days in his study at home. Mrs. Mowbray had not thought of the more certain way of sending it to his chambers. His daughters, with whom their aunt was not a particular favourite, thought it would keep very well till their father's return.

END OF VOL. I.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 084218558